Parables as Subversive Speech

William R. Herzog II

Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed

Parables as Subversive Speech

Parables as Subversive Speech

William R. Herzog II

Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed

Westminster/John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky

© 1994 William R. Herzog II

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Westminster/John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

Scripture quotations from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible are copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission.

Book and cover design by Susan E. Jackson

Cover illustration: The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, woodcut, by R. F. McGovern, Narberth, Pennsylvania

First edition

Published by Westminster/John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky

This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39.48 standard.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

9 8 7 6 5 4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Herzog, William R., date.
Parables as subversive speech : Jesus as pedagogue of the oppressed / William R. Herzog. — 1st ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-664-25355-5 (alk. paper)
1. Jesus Christ—Parables. 2. Jesus Christ—Political and social views. 3. Palestine—History—To 70 A.D. 4. Palestine—Social conditions. I. Title.
BT375.2H44 1994
226.8′06—dc20 93-44987

Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Part 1
The Parables of Jesus, the World of the Parables,
and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Introduction to Part 1

1. The Parables of Jesus, the Reign of God,
   and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed
2. The Peril of Not Modernizing Jesus
3. Interpretive Strategies for Reading the Parables
4. The World of Agrarian Societies
   and Traditional Aristocratic Empires

Part 2
Unmasking the World of Oppression:
Posing the Problems

Introduction to Part 2

5. Blaming the Victims of Oppression:
   The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16)
6. Peasant Revolt and the Spiral of Violence:
   The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1–12)
7. The Unbridgeable Chasm:
   The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31)

8. What If the Messiah Came and Nothing Changed?
The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:23–35)
9. The Vulnerability of the Whistle-blower:
The Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27)

Part 3
Opening Up New Possibilities:
Challenging the Limits

Introduction to Part 3
10. The Deviant and Prominent Toll Collectors:
The Parable of the Pharisee and the Toll Collector (Luke 18:9–14)
11. The Moral Economy of the Peasant:
The Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8)
12. Justice at the Gate?
The Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8)
13. A Weapon of the Weak:
The Parable of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1–9)
14. Concluding Remarks

List of Abbreviations
Notes
Selected Bibliography
Index of Modern Authors
Index of Ancient Texts

For Mary, Daniel, and Catherine

Acknowledgments

In writing this work, I was reminded constantly of my indebtedness to many people. The first and perhaps greatest debt is owed to the students who have participated in my seminars on the parables, which were offered at the Graduate Theological Union and the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, California; Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kansas; and Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary in Rochester, New York. In each location, I encountered eager learners who were willing to experiment with different approaches to the parables and to engage the problems they posed. As any teacher knows, we learn far more from our students than we teach them. In this regard, it has been especially pleasing to watch former students such as David Batstone, Bill Dols, and Ched Myers become colleagues and pioneers in using the social sciences to enrich their own original work.

I owe an equal debt to the clergy and laity who invited me to propose a new approach to the parables and explore its implications with them. We did this together in local churches, regional conventions, and national gatherings. It was in no small measure the interest and excitement of these folks that motivated me to keep working on this project at just those moments when it seemed that it would never be completed. Although the pastoral dimensions of this study are not addressed until the final chapter, these gatherings continually reminded me that these studies of the parables were intended primarily for the church as the people of God.

In numerous academic settings, I have been fortunate enough to find colleagues who have stimulated, challenged, and nurtured my work. I risk mentioning some, knowing that I may inadvertently omit others. I am especially indebted to Marvin Cheney, Robert Coote, J. William

Countryman, John Donahue, Sandra Schneiders, Herman Waetjen, and Ann Wire, all of the Graduate Theological Union, who modeled diverse ways of interpreting biblical texts. Anyone who attempts to use the social sciences in biblical interpretation is indebted to Norman Gottwald, who was at the Graduate Theological Union during my early years there. His pioneering work *The Tribes of Yahweh* revealed the extraordinary possibilities of using the social sciences to interpret biblical texts. During my years at the American Baptist Seminary of the West, I was fortunate enough to work with George Cummings and Karen Tye, a theologian and an educator, respectively, who took an interest in this work and deepened it by exposing it to the riches of their disciplines and interests. As a seminarian at the same school, I was inspired to pursue further graduate work by the most gifted teacher I have ever known, Robert Laurin, then professor of Old Testament and now of blessed memory. In this same setting, I was introduced to Paulo Freire by an extraordinary campus minister, Daniel Statello, who was then pursuing his doctoral degree. His life ended prematurely and tragically, but his blessed memory continues to inspire.

Numerous colleagues in the Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation Working Group of the Catholic Biblical Association have contributed to this work by sharing resources and their own work on projects different from this in scope and subject but similar in methodology. Most of them also attend the Context Group. I wish to acknowledge my special indebtedness to John Elliott of the University of San Francisco; Bruce Malina of Creighton University; Halvor Moxnes of the University of Oslo; Jerome Neyrey of the University of Notre Dame; Douglas Oakman of Pacific Lutheran University; John Pilch of Catonsville, Maryland; and Richard Rohrbaugh of Lewis and Clark College. Each has contributed to the perspectives informing portions of the present study, although none of them would necessarily agree with its method or conclusions.

In the course of my discussions, I have engaged many earlier interpreters of the parables, and although I often contend with them, I hope I have done so without contentiousness. I would not want my differences with them, even when stated sharply, to distract either from the debt I owe them or the respect I have for their work.

In addition, I have been fortunate to work with an editor, Harold Twiss, who has nurtured this project and made countless suggestions to improve it. He has been patient and perceptive. No one could ask more than he has

provided, and I am grateful for his careful work. None of the defects that remain can be traced to his good work or to the influence of the many colleagues who have contributed to this study. They have improved this work beyond measure. The defects that remain are my responsibility alone.

Finally, I owe the greatest debt of all to my family, who have supported me through this project’s gestation period and suffered with me through its birth.

Introduction

This study is written in the spirit with which Nils Bohr began his lecture courses. According to Jacob Bronowski (1973, 334), Bohr would say to his students, “Every sentence that I utter should be regarded by you not as an assertion but as a question.” To put the matter a bit differently, every assertion is a question in disguise, especially when one is engaged in the task of interpreting texts as elusive as the parables, because interpretive readings often arise as attempts to clarify obscurities and ambiguities or to resolve mysteries into more fundamental elements. It was in part because I regarded the interpretations of others as disguised questions that I undertook this investigation. The question in disguise that initiated this work was posed by the intractable sense of injustice that continued to surround the ending of the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16) in spite of interpreters’ best efforts to dispel it and replace it with a sense of grace abounding. Every assertion about the generosity of the vineyard owner seemed to be little more than a camouflaged question.

The task of understanding the end of that parable turned out to be no simple matter of surveying previous interpretations and selecting the ones that were most compatible with my theological perspectives. It required knowing who appeared in the parable, where they fit into the configuration of their society, what roles they were playing, what classes or social groups they represented, how landowners and day laborers were related to each other socially and economically, why the workers were standing in the agora all day, why they were hired to work in a vineyard, why they were hired for only a day and paid at the end of the day, why some were hired for less than a day and how much they could have expected to be paid, how much a denarius was worth in their social setting, why the owner paid them in reverse order, and why they were offended at the owner’s generosity. The

reading produced by my engagement with these and similar questions is found in chapter 5.

The fact that I was asking questions about the social scenes and social scripts that appeared in the parables necessitated new kinds of research in a variety of academic disciplines associated with the social sciences. The most important disciplines used in this study involved the macrosociology of advanced agrarian societies, the characteristics of bureaucratic and aristocratic empires, the nature of Mediterranean societies, and the way "economies" worked in antiquity. As the project progressed, it was also clear that this range of research would have to be complemented by work in cognate areas such as peasant studies, the nature of village life, the nature of "politics" and patron-client relations in the ancient world, and the role and meaning of legal systems. The social scene presented in a parable is a bit like a piece removed from a jigsaw puzzle. It is part of a much bigger picture and assumes meaning in relationship to that larger whole. To understand the meaning of the piece entails some comprehension of the larger picture to which it contributes and some delineation of its relationship to other pieces in the puzzle. The results of my efforts to make sense of these materials and apply them to the parables are found in chapter 4 and throughout the discussions of the parables in parts 2 and 3.

As this research in the social sciences began to unfold, it provided a framework for developing some unfamiliar readings of familiar parables. But the readings did not always make sense. They were not like the familiar theological and moral readings to which I had been accustomed, and they raised questions without immediate answers. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard illustrates the dilemma. Why would Jesus tell a story in which a wealthy landowner exploits day laborers by paying them a malnutrition wage and then shames them when they complain of unfair treatment? My research into agrarian societies and aristocratic empires had produced some unusual readings, but to what end?

The answer to this question came with the realization that every interpreter of the parables of Jesus was also an interpreter of the ministry of Jesus and fit the parables into that larger picture of what Jesus was about. If the parables were about theology and ethics, it was because Jesus was a "teacher" of truths about God and of moral principles. If the parables were about the coming reign of God, it was because Jesus was a "preacher" of the kingdom of God. If the parables were meant to subvert the world of

their listeners, it was because Jesus was a subversive of sorts. Every reading of the parables was anchored in a reading of Jesus' life and the purpose of his public activity. How, then, could the readings of the parables that I was developing fit some image of Jesus' public activity? That was a difficult question for which there was no quick or easy answer. Eventually, the work of Paulo Freire provided the clues needed to answer the question, at least in a provisional way. The parables as I was reading them made sense if they functioned for Jesus as the codification worked in Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. This meant that the parables were not earthly stories with heavenly meanings but earthy stories with heavy meanings, weighted down by an awareness of the workings of exploitation in the world of their hearers. The focus of the parables was not on a vision of the glory of the reign of God, but on the gory details of how oppression served the interests of a ruling class. Instead of reiterating the promise of God's intervention in human affairs, they explored how human beings could respond to break the spiral of violence and cycle of poverty created by exploitation and oppression. The parable was a form of social analysis every bit as much as it was a form of theological reflection. The discussions focused on this issue are found in chapters 1 and 2 and worked out in the readings of the parables contained in parts 2 and 3.

One consequence of this way of reading the parables was clear: If Jesus' parables are read as codifications, they will be read out of a liberationist framework. Some would contend, no doubt, that scholarship should be objective or neutral, as if objectivity were possible in historical study. It seems increasingly obvious that the claim to objectivity is essentially a rhetorical ploy to assert the authority of an argument, and because all efforts to remain neutral actually serve the interests of some group, it is impossible to take refuge in neutrality. This work is an engaged study of the parables written out of a conviction that they did function as part of the liberation praxis of Jesus' ministry. The work of Freire and Juan Luis Segundo provided vital clues for reading Jesus' ministry and parables. Frederic Jameson (1981, 19–20) captured the spirit of this inquiry when he wrote about "narrative as a socially symbolic act" that all narratives must be "grasped as vital episodes in a single, vast unfinished plot," which tells the uninterrupted story of the struggle between oppressor and oppressed. "It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental

history, that the doctrine of the political unconscious finds its function and necessity."

This approach to the parables requires that their canonical form(s) be scrutinized with care. As they stand in their present narrative settings, the parables serve the theological and ethical concerns of the evangelists. However, if the purpose they served in Jesus' ministry was quite different from the purposes of the evangelists, then they have to be analyzed with a concern for making that distinction clear. Consequently, the present study utilizes the tools growing out of the historical-critical method, including form criticism and redaction criticism. Conversely, this approach devotes little attention to the narrative contexts of the parables and uses literary-critical approaches most sparingly. The reasons for these decisions are spelled out in chapter 3.

Part 1, which includes chapters 1 through 4, sets the framework for the readings of the parables that occupy parts 2 and 3. It is possible to turn directly to the readings of the individual parables in parts 2 and 3. To make the later chapters accessible, it has been necessary to repeat in varying forms some of the theoretical material contained in chapter 4. The repetition was done to make the study of each particular parable accessible. I also thought it advisable to repeat some materials, because the reader may be more familiar with the theological discussions of the parables than with the materials drawn from the social sciences. Repetition may help to reinforce the perspectives developed here and to illustrate the nature of their applicability to specific parables.

This study focuses on selected parables. There are reasons for limiting this study to nine parables. The most obvious reason is limitation of space. It seemed preferable to study nine parables in some detail than to survey a greater number of parables in superficial fashion. The purpose of this study is to make a case for a particular kind of reading, and the interpretations of the parables here make that case. Although the case could have been nuanced and expanded by the inclusion of other materials, it has been presented in a manner adequate to establish the approach advocated here. Another reason for limiting the number of parables studied is to emphasize the point that this study does not claim to have found the only true way to read the parables. Some parables simply will not fit the framework proposed here; nor should they. If the history of the interpretation of the parables has produced any "assured result," it is that the parables are as

elusive as mercury and slip from the grasp of anyone who tries to hold them too tightly. Limiting this inquiry to nine parables underscores the parameters and limits of this study.

In important ways, this study of the parables is part of a larger project and, as a result, is incomplete in itself. The studies of individual parables point to larger perspectives that remain undeveloped in the present study. Within the confines of the present work, it was not possible to construct a larger view of Jesus' ministry or to relate the parables to other materials in the gospel traditions, such as controversy stories, healings, exorcisms, and the Jerusalem sequence. That work awaits a later time. Nevertheless, this work can stand on its own as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the parables and should be read in that light.

Part 1

The Parables of Jesus, the World of the Parables, and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

This study of the parables poses a problem that can be expressed in a series of questions: What if the parables of Jesus were neither theological nor moral stories but political and economic ones? What if the concern of the parables was not the reign of God but the reigning systems of oppression that dominated Palestine in the time of Jesus? What if the scenes they presented were not stories about how God works in the world but codifications about how exploitation worked in Palestine? What if Jesus' parables were more like Paulo Freire's "codifications" than like sermon illustrations? What if the parables are exposing exploitation rather than revealing justification? What would all this mean for a reading of the parables?

Chapter 1 sets out the framework for this experiment in reading the parables by making the case for using the pedagogy of a modern educator, Paulo Freire, for understanding the parables of an ancient rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. This comparison raises other fundamental questions, which are pursued in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 discusses the hermeneutical nature of historical inquiry, since the quest for the historical Jesus is a problem intricately related to the meaning of the parables spoken by Jesus. Any interpreter of the parables must have some understanding of the purpose of Jesus' ministry, of which they were an important part. But as Albert Schweitzer (1956) knew, the quest for the historical Jesus merely poses the larger problem of how modern researchers can investigate the past without falling prey to anachronistic readings of eras distant from their own.

Chapter 3 shifts the hermeneutical issue from the relationship of the parables to the historical Jesus to a review of the various historical tools developed to study the parables themselves. This review surveys the principal approaches that grow out of the historical-critical method. The chapter also explores the peculiar form of the hermeneutical circle known as the relationship between the part and the whole, as a prelude to suggesting a way of proceeding with this study. In light of the current dominance of literary-critical and narrative approaches to the parables, it is important to explain why this study continues to use earlier critical approaches to the parables that are now in some disrepute.

Chapter 4 delineates the world of agrarian societies and aristocratic empires, in order to define the “social construction of reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1967) in which the parables were told. If the parables present narrative snapshots from everyday life, then it is important to know the big picture in which they fit. How do the social scenes and social scripts of the parables disclose and explore the larger social, political, economic, and ideological systems of Palestine during the time of Jesus? How do the particulars in the parables fit into the infrastructure and superstructure of Palestine under Roman rule? How does the information learned about agrarian societies and aristocratic empires enable modern readers to decode the riddles called parables? The materials found in this chapter are later used to contextualize the scenes presented in the specific parables that are interpreted in parts 2 and 3.

1

The Parables of Jesus, the Reign of God, and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The parables of Jesus have long been revered as earthly stories with heavenly meanings. They have been viewed in this way because Jesus was thought to be a teacher of spiritual truth and divine wisdom. However, this view of Jesus stands in some tension with the account of his final trial and execution. If Jesus was a teacher of heavenly truths dispensed through literary gems called parables, it is difficult to understand how he could have been executed as a political subversive and crucified between two social bandits. It appears that Jerusalem elites collaborating with their Roman overlords executed Jesus because he was a threat to their economic and political interests. Unless they perceived him to be a threat, they would not have publicly degraded and humiliated him before executing him in as ignominious a way as possible. How is it possible to bring together the teacher who spoke in parables and the subversive who threatened the ruling powers of his day? This chapter attempts to answer that question in two ways: first, by interpreting the parables of Jesus as a form of subversive speech; and second, by connecting that view of the parables with an interpretation of Jesus' public activity large enough to encompass his roles as pedagogue of the oppressed and political threat.

The Parables and the Reign of God

A long and hallowed tradition has held that many of Jesus' parables proclaim the coming of the reign of God.[1] The Gospel of Mark summarizes Jesus' public message with these familiar words: "The critical time is fulfilled, the reign of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15; author's translation). Many parables are introduced by phrases that explicitly identify their focus as the reign of God (for example, Matt. 13:24; Mark 4:26; Luke 14:15–24; and their parallels). Other parables are clearly devoted to closely related themes, such as the great judgment (Matt. 25:14, 31), or warn of the coming apocalypse (Matt. 22:11–14; Mark 13:34–37; Luke 13:24–30). Even when the parables turn their attention to theological (Matt. 20:1–16; Mark 4:26–29; Luke 15:3–7), spiritual (Matt. 11:16–19; Luke 13:6–9), or moral matters (Matt. 5:25–26; Mark 12:1–11; Luke 10:25–37), their intent seems as clear as their semantic field. Through the parables, Jesus proclaims the nearness of the reign of God and communicates the spiritual truths and moral insights related to its advent.

In the early part of the twentieth century, C. H. Dodd (1935) established this way of viewing the parables by his persuasive and influential reading of the parables as "the parables of the kingdom." In reading the parables in this way, Dodd was building on the earlier hermeneutical insight of Adolf Julicher (1910), who had argued that parables were not allegories but stories meant to communicate only a single point. Julicher believed that the single point of each parable could be found by formulating the broadest possible ethical generalization implied by the story, but Dodd, armed with the form-critical method and a different theology, disagreed. The key to the parables, he insisted, was to be found in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. This announcement accounts for the "parables of crisis," which exhort their hearers to watchfulness, and the "parables of growth," which declare the arrival of the kingdom as a small and seemingly insignificant presence in the world that will, in time, grow to full stature (Dodd 1935, 154–94). In addition to these two clear clusters of parables, Dodd was able to weave a great variety of other parables into the "setting in life" of Jesus' ministry, always managing to discover their relationship to his proclamation of the coming reign of God by skillfully removing ecclesial accretions and reconstructing the earliest form of the parable.

Joachim Jeremias ([1947] 1963) built on the work of both Julicher and Dodd. With Julicher, Jeremias was convinced that each parable communicated only one point, so that the goal of interpretation was to find

the *tertium comparationis,* the central comparison, the fulcrum on which the parable's meaning turned. But Jeremias had learned from Dodd that the meaning need not be confined to the moral readings suggested by Julicher but could grow out of the theological themes associated with Jesus' ministry. Dodd had limited himself to one theme, the proclamation of the kingdom of God, but Jeremias saw no reason to squeeze all of the parables into a single mold. So he expanded Dodd's schema by identifying more than one "setting in life" for Jesus' ministry and then organizing the parables into nine distinct theological themes related to those contexts (Jeremias 1963, 115–229). Yet for all his careful work, Jeremias's departure from Dodd was more apparent than real and revealed his indebtedness to him, for all nine of his theological themes were basically elaborations of the meaning of the arrival of the reign of God in the person and work of Jesus.

The Parables as Primers of Ethics and Theology

The work of Julicher, Dodd, and Jeremias represents a tradition of scholarship that has taken the parables to be expressions of theology and ethics in story form. In this context, the primary task of interpretation was to bridge the apparent gap that separated the story of the parable from the discourse it was clearly intended to generate. The details of the parable were investigated only to the degree necessary to establish the theological or ethical correlations that needed to be made. The scene presented in the parable was understood not as a social scene important in and of itself but as a set of ciphers, whose secret message had to be decoded so that its true meaning could be explicated. This procedure was in keeping with the basic meaning of the word that was translated as "parable." *Parabolē* translates *mashal*, whose basic meaning is "riddle" (see Scott 1989, 3–62). Of course, the same scene could be decoded in numerous ways. Consequently, interpreters who were persuaded that each parable communicated only one point nevertheless managed to produce a bewildering variety of interpretations. Yet even this diversity remained within a recognizable set of parameters. The reason for this seemingly contradictory result lies in the fact that later interpreters took their cues from the Gospel writers, whose interpretations of the parables continued to exercise a strong influence on them.

Even after form critics had carefully removed the parables from their narrative contexts to reconstruct their meaning in another "setting in life," they often continued to read the parables in ways related to their setting in the gospel text. The reason for this is not hard to find. Before integrating the parables into their narratives, the Gospel writers had selectively invested them with theological and ethical meanings consistent with their larger themes and concerns. They were not interested in allegorizing the parables and were therefore inconsistent. One detail or character might be invested heavily with theological meaning (the man who went out to hire laborers becomes a God figure) while other details were ignored (the bargaining with the laborers). This selective investment of the details of these parables may be called "theologory," a kind of allegory in the making but incomplete, inconsistent, and highly selective. Klyne Snodgrass (1983, 12) would refer to this phenomenon as a "partial allegory or mixed form." The investment strategies differed from one gospel writer to another, one preferring to append explanatory codicils to defend his accounts (Mark 4:14–20 and parallels; Matt. 13:36–43) while another tended to wrap his investments in carefully crafted portfolios (Luke 10:25–28, 36–37; 18:1–14).

The form critics were keenly aware of the Gospel writers' work. Jeremias (1963, 23–114) devoted the first substantial portion of his study to the problem of returning "to Jesus from the primitive church." In this section, he identified a number of factors that had to be taken into consideration in any form-critical reconstruction of the original parable spoken by Jesus. The major ones were as follows: "representational changes" in the details of the story as it moved from a rural Palestinian to an urban Hellenistic setting; the tendency toward "embellishment" found in folk stories and the influence of parallel materials from the Old Testament and folk literature; "the change of audience" from the opponents of Jesus to his disciples and the early church; "the hortatory use of the parables by the church," which removed them from their polemical context in Jesus' ministry and reset them in the Gospels as words to the wise; and the struggle to understand the delay of the Parousia and the unfolding Gentile mission of the church. However, like all of those who preceded him and many of those who followed, Jeremias was convinced that the semantic field of the parables remained in the realm of theology and ethics. It was precisely this unchanged semantic field that allowed the Gospel writers to adapt the

parables for their communities when they committed them to writing. A parable spoken by Jesus to rebut his Pharisaic opponents and defend his gospel might indeed have been turned to hortatory uses by the church (for example, Luke 15:4–7), but it remained a parable about "God's mercy for sinners." Jesus told the parable to defend the sinners toward whom God's love was being shown, and the church retold it to celebrate "God's love" by the community of sinners who claimed that love through Jesus. The transformations were variations on the insider-outsider theme.

In time, form-critical readings of the parables would give way to redaction-critical readings, which would focus almost exclusively on the parable as a vehicle for the evangelist's theology and ethics. After a reign of two decades, redaction criticism would be dethroned by a variety of literary-critical approaches, but the focus would remain essentially the same. Theology and ethics by any other name, whether "advent," "reversal and action," or "literary-existential," remained the same (Crossan 1973; Via 1967).

One apparent exception to this rule emerged with the development of literary-critical readings of the parables that attacked the theologizing of the parables as energetically as Julicher had railed against their allegorization. By shifting attention to the narrativity and metaphoricity of the parables, interpreters sought to discern how they worked to change human perception and traditions of language. Seen in this light, the parables generated interiorized apocalypses in which one's individual perception of reality was subverted, shattered, and reconstituted. Because the parable's structure held the vital clues to its function, a great deal of attention was devoted to its literary form, and because parabolic language was paradoxical, the more minimalist the parable, the more original its form (see the work of Crossan, Funk, Scott, Via, and the early issues of *Semeia*, especially vols. 1, 2, and 4, for examples of this approach). The language of the parables was explored more for the purpose of disclosing how its metaphors operated than for any clues it held regarding the social world in which it was spoken or the social scripts it presented. Parable became metaparable, which forced its readers to reinterpret the meaning of interpretation itself (see Crossan 1980, 25–64, on the parable of the sower).

The differences between the Dodd–Jeremias tradition and the literary-critical tradition are minimal. Both produced "idealist" readings of the parables, without much regard for the importance of their "materialist"

scenes.[2] The scenes presented in the parables were valued for their theological, ethical, or metaphoric value, and once this was established, the details of the parable were left behind. Given this basic orientation, it mattered little whether one operated with a moral generalization (Julicher), a single theological theme (Dodd), a variety of theological themes (Jeremias), existential themes (Via), or a philosophy of language and perception (Crossan, Funk). The fate of the social world or social scripts glimpsed in the parable was the same: they were ignored or, after cursory examination, neglected. The parable thus generated a discourse that was finally unrelated to the material details of its story world or narrative. The notion that language, even the language of Jesus, once lived as part of a social, political, economic system, which gave it birth and provided its resonance, was foreign to the enterprise of interpreting the parables.

At the same time, as the parable was being removed from its world, it was being situated most comfortably in the world of the interpreter. What could be more natural than for teachers of theology and ethics to assume that Jesus was engaged in the same activity or for professors of religion with a passion for poetics to assume that Jesus' parables were poetic creations? In short, in their quest for the parables of Jesus, these interpreters treated the parables very much as their earlier counterparts, in their quest for the historical Jesus, had treated the rabbi from Nazareth. The parablers are merely a subset of the historians. With a few substitutions, what Albert Schweitzer said about the quest for the historical Jesus could be said about the interpreters of the parables: "It was not only each [intellectual movement] that found its reflection in [the parables]; each individual [interpreter] created [them] in accordance with his [or her] own [ideological passion]" (Schweitzer 1956, 4).

The Parables of Jesus and the Historical Jesus

The comparison of the quest for the parables of Jesus with the quest for the historical Jesus raises a fundamental question. Any study of Jesus' parables will be predicated on some larger understanding of what Jesus' public work was all about.[3] It is not possible to analyze the pieces without some view of the whole. Yet this determining gestalt is rarely, if ever, discussed. How can one judge what the parables are about unless one

locates them as part of some larger strategy that led eventually to Jesus' execution as a subversive to the Roman order and a false claimant to political power in Judaea? Rarely is the need for this criterion brought to the level of conscious reflection. Even when criteria for adjudicating the "authenticity" of Jesus' sayings are identified, the larger issue remains submerged beneath the details of the arguments about specific utterances. The issue here is not the possibility of reconstructing such a complete framework but the necessity of entertaining one in order to evaluate even the most fragmentary piece of the tradition, whether a saying or a parable. All perception requires a paradigm, without which individual events seem random and collections of data seem unrelated (Kuhn 1970, 43–51). In the absence of a consciously articulated paradigm, interpreters will substitute their own plausibility structures and smuggle them into the discussion of the particular parts. Even when it is seemingly absent, the underlying vision of Jesus' public work informs the discussion of particular parables or specific sayings.

Interpreters vary in the degree to which their paradigms are visible. Jeremias envisions Jesus as a cross between a rabbi and a Christian theologian; Kenneth Bailey believes him to have been a poet and a peasant; John Dominic Crossan, a master of metaphor and poet of the interior apocalypse; Dan Via, a purveyor of existential philosophy through comic and tragic stories; Robert Funk, a poetic philosopher who inaugurated a new language tradition that undermined its ossified predecessor. By turns, Jesus is a poet, philosopher, ethicist, theologian, storyteller in the tradition of Franz Kafka or Jorge Luis Borges, "Christian" rabbi, Jewish rabbi, Lutheran theologian, preacher, and Christian minister in disguise. As this brief list makes clear, the model used to interpret Jesus the parabler, more often than not, is a contemporary one. Perhaps interpreters' reserve about clarifying their gestalt of Jesus derives from the fear that its anachronistic character would be revealed.

This dilemma is not new. Schweitzer (1956, 1–12) saw it quite clearly. It can be traced, in part, to the very nature of the gospel materials. By the time the Jesus tradition was codified into a narrative, it had already been formed in ways that made it impossible to use for the purpose of reconstructing any whole image of Jesus' public activity. Its oral prehistory assured that it would present gaps that could not be closed. Much of Jesus' activity would remain an irrecoverable mystery, replaced by a theological reading of his

life and death that concealed as much as it revealed. Yet the mystery remained because it could not be explained by the dogmatic, revisionist version of events, and as long as mystery lingered, it tantalized those who touched it to try their hand at solving it. How, then, could the inquirer invoke a paradigm whose component parts rendered its construction impossible? How could the contradiction be solved? Schweitzer himself provided the answer: "with historical imagination . . . There is really no other means of arriving at the order and inner connexion of the facts of Jesus than the making and testing of hypotheses" (Schweitzer 1956, 7). Seen in this light, every study of the parables of Jesus has entailed a hidden act of historical imagination, in which the interpreter conjured an image of Jesus' ministry in order to construe the parables. But the hidden hypothesis that governed the visible interpretation was not examined. It was left to be inferred from the results of the more accessible interpretive task.

This analysis unsettles the popular image of what is involved in historical research. We are led to believe that the historian painstakingly collects data and, after careful and objective analysis, assembles the bits of information to form a larger whole. If this were the case, then any picture of Jesus' total work should grow out of an empirical search for the pieces and objective evaluation of each one. This is certainly the implicit model that has guided a number of searches for the historical Jesus or the historical parables of Jesus. Of course, it assumes the possibility of an objective researcher and an impartial analyst of facts, and it was precisely the impossibility of both that Schweitzer exposed. It is more likely that inquiry works in exactly the opposite way. One begins with a theory, not with facts; with a paradigm in place, not with a tabula rasa; with subjective involvement, not impersonal detachment; with an agenda, perhaps a hidden agenda, not with a neutral position; with a subtext as well as a text, with suspicions, hunches, and guesses, not with innocence (see Boulding 1968; Kuhn 1970; Gager 1975). The task of historical inquiry is to test the feasibility of the originating hypothesis rather than to confirm the outcome hidden at the beginning of the project, which covertly controls its subsequent course before emerging as an assured result at its close. When John Gager wrote his ground-breaking work on the usefulness of the social sciences for New Testament studies, he argued that new theoretical frameworks create new facts or allow us to see new significance in data that we had overlooked because we either did not see it or deemed it insignificant (see Gager 1975, 2–18).

Paulo Freire as a Key to Understanding Jesus of Nazareth

This paradigm shift in how research is conducted suggests that historians inevitably use contemporary models to understand the past. This study of Jesus' parables follows that precedent by using the work of a modern educator, Paulo Freire, as a paradigm for understanding Jesus of Nazareth. In particular, this study compares both the larger social role each one has played as pedagogue of the oppressed and their use of analogous communication tools, the codification and the parable. Freire used codifications as tactics in his larger educational strategy, and in similar fashion, Jesus used parables for tactical purposes related to the strategy of his larger public activity. It is always dangerous to compare figures from different historical eras, and the task becomes more complex when they come from different cultures as well. Not only is the danger of anachronism ever present, but the risk of cross-cultural misunderstanding is high, especially when the interpreter comparing them shares the culture of neither figure. Yet this study of an ancient rabbi's parables takes some important cues from the work of a contemporary Brazilian educator. This being the case, it is important to establish the relationship between these two figures, for it is always tempting to claim too much in the face of too little evidence.

At the outset, it needs to be clear that this study does not depict Jesus of Nazareth as a first-century version of Paulo Freire. Jesus did not anticipate Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" by launching a literacy campaign in Galilee and Judaea during the early decades of the common era. No such claim could be sustained on the basis of available evidence about Jesus' public activity. Even areas where one can claim similarities yield equally important differences. Both men are educators, but the contrast between a first-century Jewish rabbi and a twentieth-century university professor is pronounced. Nor are their social and geographical settings the same. Jesus of Nazareth was a rural artisan in an agrarian peasant society whose public activity was largely confined to the countryside and villages of Galilee, Samaria, and Judaea, including at least one pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Freire spent his formative years in the middle-class home of an urban family in northeastern Brazil but has become a citizen of the world, living and working for extensive periods of time on at least four continents.

Their cultural influences and ideological commitments are as distinct as their historical settings. Freire's thought reflects a wide variety of intellectual indebtedness, ranging from Karl Marx to Sigmund Freud, from existentialism to humanistic psychology, and from structuralism to liberation theology. His reading of his country's colonial past includes a sharp eye for its continuing effects on Brazil's current political systems. Jesus was shaped by the Torah and the readings of the Torah prevalent in his time. While he developed his own reading of Torah as an instrument for spelling out the justice of the reign of God, he also learned to read his colonial context, which was dominated by Roman overlords. His perceptions were influenced and shaped by his social location as the son of a village artisan who became an itinerant rabbi, wandering through the client kingdom of Herod Antipas and the imperial province of Judaea. Given these striking differences, it would simply be asking too much to require either figure to speak with the other's voice or to expect them to be engaged in the same activity at two different periods of time.

What, then, does this study suggest about the relationship between Jesus and this other Paul? Before answering this question, it is necessary to sketch a basic picture of Paulo the educator and Jesus the parabler.

Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Paulo Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, a port city in an area of Brazil notorious for its poverty. Although he was born into a middle-class family, his father lost nearly everything during the depression of the 1930s, forcing a family move to Jaboatao. Freire, then in high school, began to have problems in school. In straitened economic circumstances, his family had hardly enough food to eat, and Paulo was too hungry to concentrate on his studies. Hunger led to a decline in his academic performance, and his poor work led to his being categorized as a slow learner and a marginal student.

In addition to educational consequences, his family's fall into poverty had important social consequences. For the first time in his life, Freire formed friendships with a group of people he had hardly known before, youths from the working class. Because he maintained previous friendships with middle-class students, he was able to observe the differences between classes and to notice how powerful they were in determining a person's

opportunities. Consequently, Freire became conscious of the role that social class plays in determining human life (see Freire and Shor 1987, 28–29, for Freire's own recounting of this period). In time, as his family's circumstances improved, he began to eat better, and with better nutrition, he began to excel in his studies, eventually attending the university in Recife. After graduation, he started teaching Portuguese grammar to high school students and discovered his love of teaching.

If the experience of hunger and deprivation defined the first critical moment in his personal formation, his return to Recife to work with urban laborers and rural peasants formed the second. He left high school teaching to accept a job teaching adult workers living in the slums and peasants living in the surrounding countryside. From these students, Freire learned to respect the folk wisdom and common language of illiterate people. They spoke with a peculiar beauty and expressed deep insights in their own idiom, if one had ears to hear. This discovery shaped Freire's future work; he would never again underestimate the intelligence of the poor. He was even able to learn from the reticence of those workers and peasants about "the culture of silence" in which they were submerged (Freire 1973a; 1973b). It was during these years that the basic elements of his pedagogy took shape.

By the 1950s, he was conducting literacy programs whose success brought him to the attention of the Brazilian government. In 1963 the government, then in a democratizing mode, invited him to serve as consultant to the Ministry of Education for the purpose of implementing his pedagogy on a national scale. But his appointment nearly coincided with the coup of 1964 that put an end not only to literacy programs, which were deemed subversive, but to the process of democratization itself. Freire was imprisoned shortly thereafter and, after nearly three months in prison, exiled (Freire and Shor 1987, 61–65). From Brazil he moved to Chile, where he continued his work with adult literacy programs before accepting a position with the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

In recent conversations with Ira Shor, Freire confesses that his early work was naive because he failed to account for the political dimensions of education (Freire and Shor 1987). After the coup that destroyed his educational project and nearly took his life, he would not underestimate the vested interest of political powers in controlling the production and distribution of knowledge through their system of schooling. Freire turned

to a Marxist analysis of class struggle to supply what his early pedagogical projects had lacked, and while his newly found political sophistication deepened his pedagogy, it did not alter its basic form. Consequently, one finds a remarkable consistency throughout all of his materials written after the coup of 1964. His evolving philosophical framework and increasing political consciousness sharpen his thinking but do not fundamentally remake his pedagogy of the oppressed.

The Literacy Campaign: Phase One, Generative Words

Freire's literacy campaigns have involved a number of closely related tasks. The first grew out of his conviction that any attempt to teach literacy needed to begin with the actual setting of the illiterate. To understand the oppressed, one must learn to perceive the world through their eyes. Therefore, Freire organized interdisciplinary teams of participant-observers to live with peasants[4] so that they could piece together their view of the world. This task entailed researching the vocabulary of the villagers and studying their habits of speech. Out of the peasants' daily discourse, the participant-observers were able to identify "generative words" that gave expression to the speakers' "thematic universe." These words revealed insights into the ways peasants looked at their world.

Not surprisingly, Freire and his teams discovered that the peasants had internalized the world of their oppressors. By "world" Freire meant a "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1967), that is, an objectification of the social relations; institutions; class relations; and distribution of wealth, power, and privilege that justified the domination of the elite and explained the deprivation of the poor. Whatever education had been provided to the peasants was a form of "banking education" (Freire 1973a, 57–74) aimed at depositing the worldview of the dominant class in the peasants' minds and hearts, thereby persuading them that they were nothing more than objects in the reality of the ruling elites. Nowhere was this practice of marginalizing peasants more pronounced than in the paternalistic "literacy" programs, whose manuals were built on words and images drawn from the worlds of both the middle class and the elites. Just by learning that "literacy" entailed memorizing words foreign to their world and sentences alien to their existence, peasants were learning that their

language and culture were insignificant and that they themselves did not count. Yet because they associated literacy with the power and glory of the elites, the poor admired the culture of the elites and tried to internalize it. This effort only increased their alienation and sharpened the contradiction generated by the consequences of the oppressed carrying the oppressor within.

Against this background, Freire's practice of beginning his literacy programs by investigating the vocabulary of peasants represents a revolutionary innovation. Rather than use the literacy manuals produced by bureaucrats who were removed from the poor and scornful of them, Freire developed a vocabulary out of the daily language of the illiterates themselves. As the teams of participant-observers accustomed themselves to the language of the village in which they lived, they listened for the generative words with which to begin their literacy work, words charged with existential meaning and phonetically rich. Once these were identified, the first phase of the campaign was over, and the pedagogy of the oppressed was underway.

Phase Two: Codifications

It may seem odd that a literacy program could generate a revolutionary pedagogy. Yet it did so because Freire used the vocabulary of the poor as a tool of social analysis so that, as they were learning to read, they were simultaneously learning to read their culture, including its systems of domination, exploitation, and marginalization. The key that unlocked this process was the "codification." In the second phase of the literacy campaign, each generative word was codified, usually into a visual image that was then presented to a "culture circle" of peasants (Freire 1973b, 41–58). Facilitated by a participant-observer from the interdisciplinary team, the peasants decoded the visual image, whether a photograph or a sketch; the process involved several steps, owing to the complex nature of the codification.

The role of these facilitators has been the subject of much attention. For Freire's pedagogy to function well, the "outsider teachers" must be able to encourage and coordinate group conversation without directing it to a hidden but previously determined conclusion (see "Introduction," by Denis Goulet, to Freire 1973b). Ideally, such a person is more like a "teacher-

learner" in dialogue with other "learner-teachers." If the facilitator dominates the group, the culture circle will simply reproduce the relations of production and power already regnant in their society. Even if facilitators do not fall into that trap, they cannot escape the fact that they bring an outside perspective to the process, as well as highly skilled powers of observation and social analysis.

Freire believes that the codification exhibits both a surface structure and a deep structure. Accordingly, the decodifying begins by describing the surface features of the codified scene or, as it is sometimes called, the "action-object whole." One important benefit of this process is that it gives the peasants distance from their culture by objectifying some aspect of it and holding it up for analysis, and because the scene is drawn from their everyday lives, it encourages them to begin social analysis from their own context. As the learners break the picture down into its constituent parts, they reflect on the relationships between the parts, between the parts and the whole, and finally between the codification and other aspects of their lives. As conversation moves from description to analysis, the learners leave the surface structure and begin to explore the deep structure of the codification. Of course, the provision of any "deep structure" can allow one to import hidden presuppositions and previous ideological readings to the codification. If the pedagogy were content only to describe the scene presented in the codification, social description would never move into social analysis, because analysis involves exploring hidden relationships and making visible previously unknown connections. In other words, all serious analysis assumes something like a surface and deep structure in the "text" being considered. One essential element in all serious learning involves penetrating the surface of a field in order to explore and discover the depths of knowledge to which it leads.

Phase Three: Decoding, Problematizing, and Recodifying

Learning to read inexorably leads to learning to read one's society through the mediation of the codification. As an object to be scrutinized and discussed, the codification mediates between the actual situation of the group and its theoretical context, as well as between what they already know and what they will come to know as they reconstitute their world by

“problematizing” its major components. Problematizing takes the previous “givens” of the world and re-presents them as problems to be solved. The very act of converting a final fact or unquestioned truth into a problem reveals the world as a human construction susceptible to change and, as a result of that epistemological shift, exposes the oppressors’ efforts to present the world as a divinely sanctioned order, subject to neither change nor questioning.

First-level codifications begin by depicting moments from the daily life of the oppressed. As they are decoded, learners begin to glimpse how experience and social systems are intricately interrelated, a complex whole, yet capable of being categorized and analyzed in smaller, more manageable segments. These discoveries are in themselves liberating because the peasants discover that they are not objects in another’s world but subjects capable of understanding their world as well as what has been done to them. They may even realize that their previous illiteracy was the intentional outcome of a system of ruling-class domination and, as such, a problem to be posed rather than a judgment about their ignorance or lack of humanity. In the movement back and forth from surface to deep structure, from codification to experience, and from parts to the whole, the process of “conscientization” is born. It is a process akin to experiencing revelation, because “problem posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality” (Freire 1973a, 68). In other places, Freire refers to this process as a movement from *doxa* to *logos*, that is, from opinion to knowledge, or as demythologizing the mythicized reality of the dominant class. But the newly literate are still focused on analyzing their own context as it has been given to them and imposed upon them.

Therefore, decoding first-level codifications is not enough. Having worked with a number of first-level codifications, the campaign asks the circles to produce new codifications that criticize the culture of silence out of which they are emerging and pose limit situations capable of being transformed through communal action. In this way, conscientization develops into praxis, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 1973a, 36). Problematizing limit situations leads to the discovery of limit acts capable of challenging the seemingly impassable boundaries exposed in the new codification and, as a consequence, creating new social arrangements. The reflection of the culture circle leads to communal action, and communal action leads to social transformation. No

longer the passive recipients of an imposed world or the active analysts of how oppression works, the oppressed become subjects capable of making history by remaking their society. They accept their vocation as historical subjects, and they become agents of humanization in a dehumanizing society.

Quite clearly, any pedagogy capable of generating these results is, by its very nature, transformative and prophetic. Freire himself believes that all true education involves the complementary acts of denunciation and annunciation, denouncing oppression in all its forms and announcing a new future. It is this particular character of problem-posing education that distinguishes it from its counterpart, banking education. The sole purpose of banking education is to perpetuate the present order; it sees the future as nothing more than an extension of the present because it serves an elite committed to preserving its present privileges and perpetuating them at all costs. Therefore, banking education can serve only to extend the control of the ruling class by convincing the oppressed either that change is impossible or that any challenge to the existing order is a diabolical assault on a divinely preordained world. This is the deposit of truth dispensed by banker-educators. By contrast, problem-posing education is utopian because it can lead to visions of a future as different from the present as prophetic speech differs from silence. Indeed, the goal of problem-posing education is to remake and re-form the world, not just from a static present to a static future but through a continually unfolding dialectic that reveals contradictions and poses resolutions that unveil new contradictions in the continuing process of transformation. To accept this vocation is to accept the task of human beings as history makers.

Phase Four: Vocabulary and Phonetic Cards

As Freire discusses the socially transformative aspects of his pedagogy, it is easy to forget that it remains based in a literacy program. The generative words were selected not only because of their existential intensity but also because of their phonetic richness. In the fourth phase of the literacy campaigns, these words were made into vocabulary cards that exhibited the building blocks out of which words are formed. Because his program had selected words from the common speech of the people, Freire was able to

motivate peasants and urban workers to understand how their language expressed their perceptions of the world and yielded a culture no less important than the high culture of the elites. He was, in other words, constructing literacy out of the materials of the "little tradition" rather than out of the classics of the "great tradition" of the urban-dwelling rulers (Redfield 1955).

The vocabulary cards were further broken down into phonetic families, which made possible their recombination into new words. The newly literate would work with phonetic families to create and recreate words, just as they were working with codifications to constitute and reconstitute their social world. The two levels of activity reinforced each other.

The Postliteracy Phase

As the villagers or slum dwellers achieved basic literacy, Freire's program moved into a postliteracy phase in which generative words were gathered in an effort to identify the thematic universe they revealed. Every historical epoch is marked by large themes, and people participate in their historical eras to the degree that they identify, shape, create, and recreate those themes. Passive spectators of history live by the themes determined by others, who in turn define their lives and limits. The failure to perceive and participate in the naming of epoch-making themes leads to a withdrawal from history as well as an abdication of the responsibility to remake history. Every such retreat ends in hopelessness. The generative themes of any era define its aspirations and the impediments that would repress their fulfillment and name the tasks that must be undertaken to realize those aspirations. Every exploration of a generative theme, then, involves interpreters more deeply in their new role as subjects capable of comprehending their world and translating their newly constituted knowledge into programs of action. The mystified illiterates became critical-thinking readers of their world.

This entire process was called conscientization because it defined a movement from a dominated consciousness to a critically active consciousness. Freire speaks of the process as a movement from a "semi-intransitive" consciousness to a "critical transitive consciousness" (Freire 1983; 1973b; n.d., 31–37). The former is the dominated consciousness of the oppressed who are unable to fathom their own situation. Immobilized

by their ignorance, they harbor the oppressor within as diseased patients host the parasites that are destroying them. This fatalism and passivity marks the consciousness of the culture of silence, overwhelmed by powerful and brutal forces, overcome by an unrelenting hopelessness, and broken only by occasional and ineffectual appeals to magic or supernatural forces to alleviate their misery.

By contrast, the latter form of consciousness is the mark of subjects aware of their role in history, able to see through final facts to the problems they pose, and courageous enough to act together to transform limit situations into opportunities for liberation. The critical transitive consciousness perceives the systems of domination "not as a closed world from which there is no exit but as a limiting situation which [it] can transform" (Freire 1973a, 34). Acclimated to forms of dialectical inquiry that problematize situations and resolve their contradictions into courses of action that lead ultimately to new contradictions, the critically aware know that their efforts remain incomplete and that their freedom resides in their ongoing participation in an unfinished project.

Although this discussion has provided no more than a fleeting glimpse of the richness of Freire's philosophy and pedagogy, it has attempted to show how a literacy campaign developed into a pedagogy of the oppressed and has also indicated why Freire was imprisoned and then exiled by a facist military regime, who feared nothing more than a peasantry and urban working class educated in this way. In their eyes, he was more dangerous than any guerrilla carrying a rifle, and his programs had to be exterminated. All of this is evident, but what may not be as evident is how Freire's pedagogy relates to Jesus the parabler.

Jesus and Paulo: Pedagogues of the Oppressed

Freire provides a starting place for formulating a whole image of Jesus' public work. In spite of the reservations expressed earlier, using Freire in this way is not as strange as it may seem. In addition to their obvious differences, Jesus and Paulo have some things in common. Both figures worked with poor and oppressed peoples, and both worked with peasants. Although Freire's work with urban laborers has no counterpart in Jesus' public activity, their peasant audiences are similar. However, even agrarian

societies are dominated by urban centers, and all members of those societies must learn how to cope with cities. As Richard Rohrbaugh (1991, 131) put it, “A peasant is an urban man [who] has a native understanding of the complexity of urban systems.” This means that the distance between Freire’s urban proletariat and peasant population may not be as great as might seem to be the case.

In addition to their target students, the social contexts of Jesus and Paulo exhibit some similarities. Both lived in advanced agrarian societies, and from the point of view of macrosociology, such societies can be compared even when they belong to different historical eras (see Lenski and Lenski 1982; Lenski 1966). Both worked in “Mediterranean societies,” which can be encompassed by a “Mediterranean sociology” (Peristiany, ed., 1966; Malina 1981, chap. 2). Of course, Brazil is also an industrializing Third World society, as well as possessing pockets of rural life that fit more closely into the advanced agrarian model, so the similarity does not constitute identity. Both figures labored in societies that had been deformed by colonial exploitation whose presence continued to shape the life of its inhabitants. The Roman imperium upheld the client kingship of Herod Antipas in Galilee, and it dominated the life of the imperial province of Judaea. The overdetermination of political and economic life by Roman colonialism identifies a phenomenon also visible in Freire’s world, where the Portuguese colonial past continued in the postcolonial period through its institutions and social arrangements. To be sure, Brazil is being preyed upon by industrialized and postindustrial powers while Palestine was being exploited by another advanced agrarian power, but for all their differences, the two situations present enough common ground to permit a comparison. Richard Horsley (1987, 3–19) calls this condition the imperial or colonial situation.

In both Jesus’ Palestine and contemporary Brazil, religion (or its first-century equivalent) plays a leading role in the lives of the rural peasants, although the complex relation of Galilean peasants to the Temple in Jerusalem is not identical to the relationship of Brazilian peasants to urban cathedrals. Still, in both cases leading priestly figures sanction and bless the impoverishment and degradation of peasant life by urban elites with whom they tend to identify and whose economic and political interests coincide with their own. Freire gives eloquent testimony to these tendencies in a number of his writings where he reflects on the role of the church. Using his

customary penchant for typology, Freire named three distinct versions of the church corresponding to its three distinctive roles in society: the "traditionalist church" is owned by the elites and functions as a tool to implement their interests; the "modernizing church" is the church of half-measures, designed to appease the craze for development while maintaining the structure of privilege; and the "prophetic church, as old as Christianity without being traditionalist," is the church serving the interests of transformation and liberation (Freire n.d., 15–28). Jesus lived in the midst of a culture controlled by the Temple and its demands, as served through the network of synagogues. The Torah and its interpretation through the oral torah generated a debate whose practical effects involved issues of social control, both prescribing and proscribing behavior. Both Jesus and Freire knew the power of what we call religion to liberate and oppress. These roles correspond to what Peter Berger identifies as the "world maintaining" and "world shaking" functions of religion (Berger 1969, 3–101).

Both figures can be identified as teachers with similar students. They work with the illiterate, the marginalized, and the poor, with peasants and villagers in the countryside. Jesus' "students" were as nontraditional for a rabbi as Freire's were for a modern educator. The similarity between their student bodies does raise the question of curriculum. Freire was clearly focused on the twin tasks of teaching literacy and social analysis. But what about Jesus? Taking a cue from Freire, one may propose that Jesus' parables dealt with issues of interest to his "students." Their social scenes are therefore important for what they tell us of the world in which the peasants and rural underclass lived. To use Freire's language, they encode generative themes and objectify conditions of oppression so that they can be examined. All of this implies that some of the parables function in a manner similar to what Freire calls "codifications." They re-present a familiar or typified scene for the purpose of generating conversation about it and stimulating the kinds of reflection that expose contradictions in popularly held beliefs or traditional thinking. But to what end?

Clearly, Jesus was not conducting a literacy campaign. Illiteracy was a fact of life, and in first-century Palestine, no more than a few would ever have commanded the skills of reading and writing. This alone explains the leverage of the scribal retainers. But neither was he teaching harmless stories with innocuous morals. If he had been the kind of teacher popularly portrayed in the North American church, a master of the inner life, teaching

the importance of spirituality and a private relationship with God, he would have been supported by the Romans as part of their rural pacification program. That was exactly the kind of religion that the Romans wanted peasants to have. Any beliefs that encouraged magic, passivity before fate, and withdrawal from the world of politics and economics into a spiritual or inner realm would have met with official approval. Had Jesus' parables indulged in apocalyptic speculation or threatened the end of the world, he would have been watched but left alone. The Eastern Empire had its share of astrologers and visionaries. Had he merely proclaimed any or all of the themes attributed to him by Jeremias, he would have inspired arguments but not malice. Had he anticipated narrativity and metaphoricity, he would have been remarkable but not crucified. Narrativity and metaphoricity were not capital crimes in the Roman Empire, and the one thing about Jesus that can be known with certainty was that he was executed as an enemy of the state and the Temple. He was crucified between two "social bandits" (*lēstēs*) on the charge of subversion because he claimed to be "king of the Jews."

Jesus' fate does point to another similarity with Freire. Both men were considered politically subversive, and both suffered political consequences because of their work. This is not insignificant. Even if Jesus were a poet, poets are not executed unless their work turns political. Even if Jesus were a theologian, theologians are not imprisoned or killed unless their theology challenges the powers that be and subverts their idolatrous claims. The great difficulty with so many of the contemporary models imposed on Jesus is that they fail to explain his crucifixion. At least Freire offers a model subversive enough to account for Jesus' humiliation and public execution.

If parabling was a part of Jesus' public activity that was followed with suspicion and eventually deemed actionable, then his parables must have dealt with dangerous issues, which always means political and economic issues, since the preservation of power and the extraction of tribute from the peasants dominated the concerns of the ruling elites of the ancient world. Any teaching that exposed exploitation and demystified the forms of legitimation used to sanctify oppression would have been considered a threat. It would seem reasonable to pose this hypothesis and test it through reading some parables.

Without invoking the entire program developed by Freire, it is possible to propose that Jesus used parables to present situations familiar to the rural poor, to encode the systems of oppression that controlled their lives and

held them in bondage. Living in a visual culture, Freire used pictures as codifications; Jesus, who lived in an oral culture, used storytelling. The parable, then, was not primarily a vehicle to communicate theology or ethics but a codification designed to stimulate social analysis and to expose the contradictions between the actual situation of its hearers and the Torah of God's justice. Even the illiterate could learn to "read" their culture and life dilemmas. Of course, any increased awareness of their political and economic situation, including the humanly designed systems that created it and perpetuated it, could incite peasants and villagers to social unrest or even revolt. Thus parabling was a risky business.

Employing Freire's work to construct a larger image of Jesus' public activity offers another advantage because it bridges the apparent gap between traditional roles often ascribed to Jesus, such as rabbi or teacher, on the one hand, and his death in Jerusalem at the hands of urban elites and colonial overlords, on the other. How could an educator be executed as a political subversive? Short of concluding that it was all a mistake, one must bridge the gap between the two. Freire's work illustrates the tie between working as a pedagogue of the oppressed and its dire political consequences. Education is not neutral; it is political to the core. In both Brazil and Galilee–Judaea, the social, political, and economic construction of reality was the creation of ruling elites, who fashioned their descriptions of reality to justify their right to power, wealth, and privilege while using it simultaneously to explain the subsistence existence of the masses. Their oppressive social orders were legitimated by this thematic universe, which attempted to mystify the ways in which they extracted their wealth from the so-called surplus of the peasants and rural poor who produced it and then accumulated it for the purposes of status display and conspicuous consumption.

Within this framework, the purpose of elite-controlled education, whether through formal schooling or informal influence and the codifying of "wisdom," was to inculcate these ideologies masquerading as cosmology and social order. Insofar as peasants and other exploited groups accepted this thematic universe and internalized its judgments, they were participating in their own oppression. Arguments over Torah, over who was clean or unclean, over who was prominent and who deviant, or over who was shameful and who honorable involved more than splitting theological hairs; they were power struggles. Any pedagogue threatening the political

role of “the great tradition” in defining the world was an enemy of the social order. To work among the masses in other than paternalistic and condescending ways was threatening. If the powerful perceived the threat as dangerous enough, they would respond with repressive measures.

Conclusion

This study, then, takes some cues from the work of Paulo Freire, especially his role as a pedagogue of the oppressed, and uses them as a guide for understanding some of Jesus’ parables. Placed in this larger context, the parables function as codifications. If they did, the interpreter must pay attention to the scenes they encode and attempt to understand how they could generate conversations that enhanced the hearers’ ability to decode their oppressive reality, or how they encode limit situations depicting limit acts that are intended to challenge the boundaries of their closed world. This is the hypothesis that guides the readings of the parables proposed in this study.

2

The Peril of Not Modernizing Jesus

One of the legacies of the Enlightenment was an increased awareness of the nature of historical understanding. Scholars became increasingly conscious of the dangers of reading the past anachronistically and sought ways to ensure that their work would reconstruct the past on its own terms. After Albert Schweitzer ([1906] 1956) revealed how thoroughly anachronistic the work of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century quests for the historical Jesus had been, biblical scholars lowered their expectations but did not change their basic methods.

This chapter suggests that "modernizing" is an inevitable concomitant of any historical reconstruction because the researchers cannot escape the conditions of their own time and circumstances. However, modernizing need not be equated with anachronizing, the unconscious or unreflective reading of the present into the past. All contemporary readings of Jesus are modernizing readings because they seek to make sense of Jesus in terms of significant modern models or paradigms, and when the paradigms or models are used with an awareness of their purpose, functioning, and limits, they can illumine research by uncovering its assumptions and parameters. From the perspective of faith, modernizing in the manner pursued here does not mean abandoning concern for the historical Jesus but recognizing that every such quest implies a concern for the meaning of Jesus in the contemporary world or for the church. Like all other historical research, the search for the historical Jesus is engaged research pursued in light of vital interests for the researcher and the church.

The Problem of Modernizing Jesus

The first chapter hinted at a larger problem involved in studying and interpreting Jesus' parables. To make sense of specific parables, interpreters need to entertain some larger idea of who Jesus was and what his public activity was about, a paradigm within which they can interpret the specifics of the parables as well as specific parables. Yet this larger image usually remains hidden or unacknowledged. When it is disclosed and analyzed, it belongs to the modern era every bit as much as to the ancient world. This dilemma raises the question of whether it is possible to conduct any inquiry into the historical Jesus or the parables without modernizing them. It is not a new question.

Cadbury and Schweitzer

In 1937, H. J. Cadbury published *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*, a scholarly warning against the tendency to introduce "anachronism in thinking about Jesus," a tendency that Cadbury found in both liberal and conservative Protestant thought. Cadbury proceeded to illustrate his contention in chapters dealing with issues such as "The Jewishness of Jesus," "Jesus and Religious Experience," and "Jesus' Social Teachings." In treating each topic, Cadbury identified examples of anachronistic thinking and suggested how they distort clearer historical understandings of Jesus.

Of course, it is easier to see the anachronism in another's eye than it is to see the modernizing in one's own. A survey of Cadbury's treatment of one theme suffices to make the point. In his chapter on "The Limitations of Jesus' Social Teaching," Cadbury calls into question the assumption of liberal Protestantism that Jesus developed a social outlook capable of speaking to the issues of the early twentieth century. Aside from the usual problems that plague any attempt to reconstruct Jesus' teachings, such as the fragmentary nature of the sources, the condensation of his words into "a few aphorisms, comments or parables" (Cadbury 1937, 86), the difficulty of inferring back from Greek to Aramaic, and the lapse of time between the spoken words and their written form, specific attempts to define Jesus' social ethic are beset by an even more troubling problem that grows out of Jesus' apocalyptic worldview. Because Jesus believed that the end was at hand, his ethical teaching was meant to define an "interim ethic" rather than

eternal principles, good for all time. In what sense, then, can Jesus' ethical teachings be applied to the problems of the modern world, when they were originally conceived to deal with a relatively brief temporal gap between the close of this age and the age to come? The cumulative weight of these difficulties led Cadbury to ask whether Jesus had any social outlook at all.

Having asked this more fundamental question, Cadbury answered in the negative by arguing that Jesus was deficient in four areas requisite for building a social ethic. First, he "rarely if ever dealt with social institutions as such" (1937, 95). While he interacted with tax collectors and sinners, he does not seem to have paid any attention to the institutions that affected them. More to the point, "he mentions without criticism in parables slaveholders, capitalists, monarchs and tax collectors" (1937, 95), as though the systemic issues associated with their roles never even entered his head. Second, Jesus exhibited nearly complete indifference to social collectives or groups and showed no interest in social solidarity. While he obviously knew of "classes . . . races, sexes, etc.," he remained oblivious to modern issues such as "class interests, class consciousness, class ideals" (1937, 97). He thought about people only as individuals. Third, in situations of "social interrelation," Jesus did not conceive of the interaction as a whole but thought only "of one [person] at a time" (1937, 100); witness the paying of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–15). Each man received the same sum without regard to the others. "Even the Golden Rule is not bifocal" but advice for each individual (1937, 101). Finally, Jesus revealed no interest in "social motive" and did not appeal to it. He appealed to religious motives, to common sense, to "spontaneous goodness," and to self-interest but not to the rights or interests of groups or to the interests of society itself. Nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels can one find "a single injunction to social service based explicitly on the neighbor's need for love and service" (1937, 104).

On one level, Cadbury is correct. The Gospels are barren of the paternalistic "Christian humanitarianism" bestowed on those less fortunate persons whose "misfortune, sickness, poverty or ignorance" motivates social service and social work (1937, 102). But the fact that Cadbury cannot see beyond this version of the social gospel reflects not the limits of Jesus but the limits of Cadbury's own age. More to the point, while accurately demolishing the anachronisms of liberal thought, Cadbury reveals his own. In denying that Jesus dealt with social institutions, Cadbury ignores the clear conflicts Jesus generated with the Temple and the synagogue as well

as his use of the household, the basic social unit of the ancient world. His trial alone enmeshed him in the juridical and political institutions of his day, and as the Beelzebul controversy (Mark 3:22–27) indicates, his conflicts with their representatives were more than expressions of individual disagreements. How could Jesus mention “capitalists” in a world that knew nothing of the market economies that capitalism presupposes (Polanyi, Arensberg, and Pearson, eds., 1957)? How could a Jew who lived in a world where the identity of one’s group was more important than one’s individual identity ignore this constitutive fact of life (Malina 1981, 51–70)?

Cadbury’s critique imports Western individualism and reads Jesus’ activity through Cadbury’s own lens. So central is his own ideology that he reduces the conflict between Jesus and identifiable groups such as the scribal Pharisees and Sadducees to disagreements between individuals devoid of group conflict or social significance. While Jesus’ social motives may be implicit in his activity, a complete lack of social motive would have rendered the crucifixion, a form of execution reserved for political criminals, meaningless. It may be quite true that Jesus’ social motive cannot be encompassed by the versions of it current in Cadbury’s time, but that coincidence does not prevent one from asking what other forms it might have taken. In the end, Cadbury retreats from a Christian paternalism that he rejects to the safety of an individualism that seems to him unassailable.

Cadbury is as clear about the remedy as he is about the diagnosis. It is only the careful study of history that exposes anachronism and prevents us from retrojecting our present onto Jesus’ world. The “demoderniza-tion” of Jesus can pave the way for an appropriate historical understanding of his work, although its initial results may seem discouraging because the careful sifting of the Jesus traditions still leaves enormous gaps and unanswerable questions. But they can be addressed when the task of “painstaking historical research” is wedded to a disciplined use of the “imagination” (Cadbury 1937, 191). The only other alternatives are either to leave the gaps empty or to fill them with popular trends and fancies. “First [must come] the labor of criticism and research, and then the artistic, poetic reconstruction” (1937, 191). Just what this means in practice Cadbury neither hinted nor illustrated.

If the conclusion sounds familiar, it is because it so closely resembles the one reached by Schweitzer ([1906] 1956) just thirty years earlier. Like

Cadbury, Schweitzer judged the materials of the gospel tradition as too scattered to yield a coherent picture and too disconnected to allow historical reconstruction, and he also saw how "each successive epoch of theology found its own thoughts in Jesus" and created him in its own image (Schweitzer 1956, 4). What Cadbury called modernizing was not new. Both men perceived the same dilemma and the same false solutions offered by popular forms of modernizing. Even their solutions were closely allied. With what do we fill the gaps? Schweitzer proposed "historical imagination." Because historical research was impossible, "historical experiment" had to take its place. "A series of experiments are repeated with constantly varying modifications suggested by the results furnished by the subsidiary sciences" (Schweitzer 1956, 9). On this point, however, Schweitzer and Cadbury disagreed, for Cadbury still held to the possibility of historical research. Even if it could bring one only to the edge of the known, it could define the boundary between the known territory and the unknown territory where the imagination had to serve as guide.

In one other way Schweitzer and Cadbury were alike. After discovering the virtually insoluble dilemma, both concluded that the most certain knowledge of Jesus is ineffable. Cadbury (1937, 192f.) resides in the knowledge offered by religious faith. In a more poetic vein, Schweitzer (1956, 403) embraces the path of religious experience:

> He comes to us as One unkown, without a name, as of old by the lake-side. . . . He speaks to us the same word, "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

Both Cadbury and Schweitzer looked to religious experience to supply what rigorous research could not.

The impasse was clear. The quest for the historical Jesus was inevitable, even though the historical materials were inadequate to the task. How could inquirers make sense of the pieces? They must establish a whole picture, derived by an act of the imagination, within which to fit the pieces. But Cadbury and Schweitzer differed over when that imaginative act occurred.

Schweitzer realized that it would serve as a hypothesis to set in motion the project that would eventually test the reliability of that initiating hypothesis. Cadbury assumed that a historian could investigate the bits and pieces with a detached eye and uncommitted mind, thereby assuring the objective results of the data analysis; then and only then could the historian draw on the resources of the imagination to provide what the data could not. In spite of Schweitzer's warning, Cadbury expressed the view that carried the day. The result was the continued presence of modernizing in covert ways that remained undetectable by the interpreter.

Bornkamm and Bultmann

Cadbury's work was written between two works that anticipated and then illustrated the consequence of his position, Rudolf Bultmann's *Jesus* (1926; ET, *Jesus and the Word*, 1934) and Gunther Bornkamm's *Jesus von Nazareth* (1956; ET, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1960). Bultmann's work was built on his earlier evaluation of gospel pericopes in *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (1921; ET, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* 1963). Using the data gathered from his investigation of the Synoptic materials, Bultmann (1934, 14) turned his attention to "this complex of ideas in the oldest layer of the synoptic tradition" in order to reconstruct the message of Jesus. After Schweitzer's devastating critique, it was clear that no life of Jesus could be written without recreating Jesus in the spirit of the author's times; by shifting his attention to the teaching of Jesus, however, Bultmann hoped to avoid the trap that had ensnared earlier interpreters. Instead, he illustrated only that Jesus' teachings, no less than Jesus' life, could be subjected to unconscious modernizing.

Bultmann's Jesus proclaims an existentialist gospel. The kingdom of God has arrived, and the hour of decision is now. It is in the moment of decision that one faces the ultimate either/or. This kingdom of God is not contained in apocalyptic speculation (contra Wilhelm Wrede and Albert Schweitzer), nor is it the highest value of humankind (contra Protestant liberalism). It is the "wholly other," opposed to all human formulation. Jesus calls all people to decision, "decision between good and evil, decision for God's will or for their own will" (Bultmann 1934, 84). Because the decision is an all-or-nothing choice, Jesus has "no so-called individual or social ethics . . . Jesus teaches no ethics at all" (1934, 84). He has neither a doctrine of duty nor a

definition of the right. The demands of God arise “from the crisis of decision in which [human beings] stand before God” (1934, 87). By the very nature of the crisis, nothing from the past can help those caught in it to calculate their future course. The person who decides will know what to do, like the Samaritan in the parable. This, then, is Jesus’ gospel. The kingdom of God has arrived in the moment, and each moment, unrelated to past or future, requires decision before God, “which must be comprehended in each concrete moment and obeyed” (1934, 101).

This being the character of Jesus’ proclamation, it follows that “the Kingdom is no ideal social order. Subversive ideas and revolutionary utterances are lacking in Jesus” (1934, 103). The Gospels present nothing of the political, social, or economic situation of first-century Palestine. Jesus is indifferent to such conditions because they deflect people’s attention from the necessity of decision before God in the moment. This is why Jesus is unlike the prophets of the Old Testament, who do speak of “the state and civil rights” (1934, 106), and this is why Jesus shares nothing in common with Jewish messianic beliefs, which were political in nature. With sharp and unwavering focus, Jesus calls people to the demand of the hour, the necessity for decision in the “now” before God.

In retrospect, it seems incredible that this effusive apology for existentialism could have been taken seriously as a presentation of the historical Jesus. It is modernizing and anachronizing in pure and undisguised form, a presentation of a Jesus removed from his historical and cultural context. Rather than moving among the peasant villages and traditional culture of Galilee, Jesus moves into the alienated world of Europe after World War I. Perhaps people living in the interregnum between the rubble of the nineteenth century and the unknown world of the twentieth century stood in the moment of decision, unable to recall the past or beckon a hopeful future, but the people of Palestine lived differently. Liberal Protestantism may have been shattered by the Great War, but Judaism was alive and well during Jesus’ time. Perhaps the people of Germany could conjure neither social nor individual ethics, but Jesus lived in the world of Moses and the prophets, who supplied both. Bultmann’s Jesus was, as Schweitzer could have predicted, created in the image of Bultmann and his contemporaries to inhabit the Europe of the 1920s. In the introduction to his study, Bultmann declared that he had completed his task of seeing Jesus in spite of the fact “that we have forgotten how to see

directly, being too much burdened with presuppositions" (1934, 15). He failed to realize that seeing directly is more often than not an illusion made possible by our invisible presuppositions. The peril of modernizing covers the teaching of Jesus as well as his life.

Thirty years after Bultmann completed his synthesis of the teaching of Jesus, one of his pupils, Gunther Bornkamm, returned to the unfinished task of presenting *Jesus of Nazareth* ([1956] 1960). Chastened by the course of historical Jesus research from Schweitzer to mid-century, Bornkamm tried to anchor his portrait of Jesus' teaching in what was known of Jesus' environment. Yet even in his initial effort (1960, chap. 3), Bornkamm revealed his indebtedness to Bultmann by portraying a Jesus who "appears in a world between past and future" (1960, 55) but without a present. In this world, Jesus appears as an "insoluble mystery" because he teaches with a directness and an immediacy unknown to either the prophets of the past or the rabbis of the present. "The reality of God and the immediacy of [God's] will are always directly present in Jesus" (1960, 57). In light of this unprecedented authority, the people who encounter Jesus step out of their background circumstances, which are quite unimportant, and stand forth as they really are, face to face with the God made present in Jesus. Their encounter puts an end to the world as they have known it, for their world cannot abide God's "unmediated presence" in Jesus' words and acts. Those who respond receive a new present; they enter into the reign of God (1960, 61–63).

The immediacy of this reign is directly proportional to its elusiveness. Any attempt to describe it comes to grief, "for it is a happening, an event., the gracious action of God" (1960, 77). It is easier to say what it is not rather than what it is. It is neither a social program nor political revolution. In an intriguing passage, Bornkamm relates Jesus' rejection of revolutionary fanaticism to a Cold War Europe that has seen the intimations of a Marxist–Christian dialogue. He is clearly offended by the appropriation of Jesus by "fanatics who wish to claim Jesus for their own as the great revolutionary" (1960, 101). They claim a great reversal of all values in the name of the revolution, whereas Jesus rejects "all fanatical disregard for the law" (1960, 102). In fact, Jesus uses the law to intensify the present moment in which God may be found. The decisive meeting with God in the moment is what counts, and that can occur to anyone at any time "where the world and its possibilities end, and the future of God begins" (1960, 109).

All of this ended in Jerusalem. Here Bornkamm was faced with a problem. Jesus' movement was "not directed against the political rulers, neither against Rome, nor against Herod" (1960, 153), and his teachings touched only marginally on political issues (1960, 120–24). Jesus came to Jerusalem "to deliver the message of the coming kingdom of God . . . to summon them at the eleventh hour to make their decision" (1960, 154, 155). Evidently, this message disturbed the rulers of the Temple, who conspired to put Jesus to death, although it is by no means clear why Jesus' message about an interior decision in the moment, without apparent effect on the external world, should have so upset them. The trial sequence also does not make sense. No one was ever put to death by Jewish authorities for claiming to be the messiah. It is more likely that Jesus would have been condemned for blasphemy, but if Jesus had been condemned for blasphemy, he would have been stoned. Instead, he was condemned by the Romans "for political crimes" (1960, 164). This can mean only that the Jews delivered him to the Romans "as a political suspect . . . to get rid of the hated prophet from Galilee" (1960, 164). But why was he hated? Bornkamm has given no reasons. The crucifixion was a motiveless mistake. Bornkamm's Jesus was both apolitical and unreligious. He was a first-century existentialist in the Bultmannian tradition whose message was so obscure it could have offended no one. Once again, the peril of modernizing Jesus becomes clear.

Anachronizing and Modernizing

Other examples could be used to make the same point. All attempts to depict Jesus' work or interpret Jesus' parables show evidences of what Cadbury called modernizing. However, Cadbury used the terms "anachronizing" and "modernizing" as synonyms, but they can be usefully distinguished from each other. Modernizing is an inevitable condition of historical inquiry. Historians cannot escape from their world into some objective sphere, detached from all contexts. To some extent, it is the historians' very context that makes perception possible. More to the point, they always bring their contemporary setting into the task of interpreting, whether consciously or unconsciously. This is where the distinction between the two terms comes into play. For the purposes of distinguishing two related but separable kinds of activity, anachronizing is defined here as unconscious modernizing, whereas modernizing is done consciously as part

of the hermeneutical task. Of course, the two processes are not completely distinct, for no interpreter can always be conscious of every hermeneutical tendency at every moment. The two processes overlap, but they are not identical.

Both Schweitzer and Cadbury recognized the need for modernizing when they appealed to the need for the historical imagination to complement historical research. Precisely because the pieces of the Jesus tradition do not complete a puzzle, the historian must create a picture within which to fit them, and this imaginative experiment will always be indebted to the historian's own world and sense of possibilities. This is true of the process whether the imaginative act occurs at the beginning of the experiment, as Schweitzer proposed, or after evaluating the units of tradition, as Cadbury believed.

The problem, then, is not with modernizing Jesus, as Cadbury thought, but with anachronizing Jesus. The peril of not modernizing Jesus is that we always modernize Jesus whether or not we are aware of it. The parameters of the present shape what we see when we peer into the past, and changing parameters shift what we are able to see. Therefore, every quest for the historical Jesus or inquiry into the parables of the historical Jesus operates with modern models or paradigms. The primary task of the interpreter is to make those paradigms as conscious as possible and to be honest about his or her modernizing work. The alternative is to declare that we are not modernizing Jesus even as we are doing it. Both Bultmann and Bornkamm illustrate most clearly this consequence.

This situation does not mitigate the need for serious historical research. The first century is not the twentieth; nor are advanced agrarian societies like modern industrial and postindustrial societies. Mediterranean culture is not identical with North American society. It is important to reconstruct the world of Jesus as it is depicted in the parables, and this task requires work in history, sociology, anthropology, and economics, as well as biblical studies and archaeology. But the basic interpretive situation does mean that the whole picture emerging from these studies will still be guided by modern paradigms and plausibility structures. This seems an inescapable consequence of any historical study, but it does not imply that all modern paradigms are equally useful or valid. Any inquiry should indicate why the particular contemporary models are being used and how they fit the situation to which they are being applied.

Conclusion

This study of the parables proposes the use of a modern figure, Paulo Freire, and his work as clues for understanding the nature of Jesus' public work and for reading the parables. By making this procedure clear, it attempts to avoid the peril of not modernizing Jesus and to lessen the risk of anachronizing Jesus. The results will have to be tested by the readings of the parables themselves.

3

Interpretive Strategies for Reading the Parables

Once it was clear that the Gospels were not unadorned historical annals but heavily interpreted presentations of Jesus of Nazareth, scholars began to develop tools for separating the layers of traditions presumably contained in the Gospels. Each tool was applied to the parables in turn, to distinguish the parable spoken by Jesus from the revised canonical version of it found in a given Gospel. Each effort at reconstruction was plagued by the same hermeneutical circle. To reconstuct any part of Jesus' teaching implied some larger understanding of his public work, and that gestalt or paradigm often influenced what one saw in the parts. In contrast, a new reading of a particular parable might pose an anomaly that called the larger paradigm into question and demanded its reconsideration.

This chapter sketches the critical tools employed in the present work, which does propose to separate layers of tradition or, at least, to identify a form of the parable earlier than the version(s) in the Gospel text(s). In light of the extensive use currently being made of various forms of literary criticism, whose concern is the narrative text in the Gospels, it seems important to explain why this study swims against the current rather than flows with it.

The Gospel of Jesus and the Gospels' Jesus

At least since the turn of the century, the study of the parables has been an integral part of the quest for the historical Jesus. Albert Schweitzer (1956, 351–97) looked to the parables for clues in his thoroughgoing eschatological reading of Jesus. Following Schweitzer's instinct but rejecting his apocalyptic eschatology, C. H. Dodd argued that the parables needed to be recontextualized in the setting of a ministry marked by Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. This proclamation amounted to the announcement of a "realized eschatology" (Dodd 1935, 34–110). Joachim Jeremias (1963, 115–229) expanded and nuanced the "setting in life" developed by Dodd, because he believed that Jesus used the parables as weapons of controversy whose meanings could be understood only when their polemics were set within the context of the debates of Jesus' day.

These three scholars are representative of the diverse ways in which the parables have been interpreted with reference to Jesus' larger public work. Consequently, each attempt to discover the meaning of the parables has required some larger understanding of the ministry of Jesus. Because the most obvious sources for reconstructing that ministry were the Gospels, many of the debates generated by the emergence of the historical-critical method centered on the reliability of the Gospels. Were they historically able to provide the raw materials needed for historical reconstruction? Could they provide a coherent framework for understanding the ministry of Jesus as well?

Separating Parable from Gospel: Form Criticism

Prior to Wilhelm Wrede's study of "the messianic secret in the gospels" ([1901] 1971), it was still considered possible to construct an outline of Jesus' public work based on the Gospel of Mark. Both Mark's priority and historical reliability had been well accepted. But after Wrede argued that each Gospel was heavily dogmatic in its presentation of Jesus, it was no longer possible to build a picture of Jesus' ministry based on the priority of Mark. The effect of Wrede's study was to encourage the separation of the historical Jesus from any Gospel portrait of him and to facilitate the removal of parables from their contexts in the Gospels as a necessary prerequisite to establishing their meaning as parables of Jesus. The Gospel writers could not be trusted to provide historical information.

The removal of the historical Jesus and the parables of Jesus from their Gospel frameworks created the need for new contexts within which each could be understood. But the separation of Jesus from the Gospels was not so easily accomplished, with regard to understanding either the nature of his ministry or the meaning of his parables. As noted in chapter 1, the very Gospel writers whose historical reliability lay under a cloud of suspicion continued to exercise a profound influence over the theological readings of the parables. However, the task had been defined, and the most useful tool for separating the parables from their Gospel contexts, form criticism, flourished and heavily influenced the study of the parables, from Rudolf Bultmann's *History of the Synoptic Tradition* ([1921] 1963) through Jeremias's culminating work, *The Parables of Jesus* ([1947] 1963). In the years subsequent to Jeremias, form criticism, in one form or another, continued to play a leading role in the work of scholars as diverse as Norman Perrin (1967), Dan Via (1967), John Dominic Crossan (1973), Charles Carlston (1975), James Breech (1983), and Bernard Scott (1989). The reason for its persistence is clear. Once the Gospel writers were acknowledged as theologians with their own agendas, interpreters of the parables had to separate the parables from their narrative contexts so that the parables could be heard to speak with voices different from those of the evangelists. The need to distinguish the canonical texts from the earlier traditions that are contained in them still remains a central task for interpretation.

The clear recognition of this situation created a second problem, one no less difficult to resolve. Because every text requires some context, the removal of the parables from the Gospels necessitated providing another context in which they could be read. Wrede (1971) and Schweitzer (1956) provided that first context, thoroughgoing eschatology. Along with its descendents, realized eschatology (Dodd 1935) and eschatology in the process of being realized (Jeremias 1963; cf. Cullmann 1964), thoroughgoing eschatology provided a framework for discussing the meaning of the parables as well as the intent of the prophet from Nazareth who uttered them. Schweitzer was confident that the apocalyptic prophet he had created out of the materials of the Gospels was so alien to any of the dogmatic portraits of Jesus contained in the Gospels that it had to be authentic. His argument amounted to an early, unarticulated version of the criterion of dissimilarity (cf. Perrin 1967, 15–53, esp. 37–43).

The work of Wrede and Schweitzer generated two reactions. The first conceded the accuracy of their reading of the issue. Apocalyptic eschatology was the Gordian knot that had to be untied. In turn, A. T. Cadoux (1931), Dodd (1935), and Jeremias (1963) accepted the context of apocalyptic eschatology but modified it to suit their purposes. The second reaction was to reinterpret the issue altogether. Bultmann ([1926] 1934) and his pupils, most notably Gunther Bornkamm ([1956] 1960), pursued this solution by using existentialist philosophy to supply the hermeneutical key needed to unlock the meaning of the apocalyptic Jesus materials. These two traditions of scholarship established the parameters within which the debate over the meaning of the parables has been conducted down to the present day. Are the parables stories of the kingdom (eschatological) or fables of human existence (existential)?

The durability and flexibility of these defining strategies can be suggested by noting how they continue to influence even those who employ literary perspectives. Not even this most contemporary approach has left the debate behind. Via (1967, 70–176) appeared to be breaking new ground in parables research when he asserted that the parables were aesthetic objects whose forms could be understood as examples of comic or tragic plots. But when he moved from aesthetic analysis to translate their meaning, Via relied on existentialism to provide the semantic clues. Take as an example Via's reading of Mark 12:1–9. The wicked tenants, like Macbeth, yield to the evil impulse to possess whatever they want, whatever its cost to others. Their "heart of darkness" reveals a void within, "an emptiness, an abyss." Acting out of that nothingness, they bring destruction upon themselves (Via 1967, 136–37). The purpose of the tragic or comic analysis of the parables was to set up their existential reading and to identify the values embodied in their characters.

In a similar vein, Crossan (1973) read the parables as a literary corpus with its own structuralist and linguistic integrity. Although he subtitled his book "The Challenge of the Historical Jesus," the historical Jesus who could be identified through a study of the parables was no more than a literary inference from the body of material studied. "The term 'Jesus' [is] a cipher for the reconstructed parabolic complex itself" (Crossan 1973, xiii). Working on the assumption that the Gospels had preserved a large enough sample of the parables to reveal their inner structural relations, Crossan identified the threefold structure of "advent, reversal, and action" as the

deep structural form of the parables and organized them around these three themes. It seemed to Crossan that this deep structure was best expressed through the language of paradox and metaphor, but when he translated the meaning of the parables from this point of view, he extended the reach of earlier apocalyptic readings rather than broke new ground. His language reflects this indebtedness. Jesus did not proclaim "that God was about to end this world, but, seeing this as one view of world, he was announcing God as the One who shatters world, this one and any other before or after it." Jesus is, in Crossan's reading, the proclaimer of a "permanent eschatology" (1973, 26, 27). The structure of advent, reversal, and action transforms parables into the bearers of epistemological apocalypses, reminiscent of earlier discussions of the parables as revealers of the eschaton of God.

Via and Crossan both illustrate the power of the apocalyptic and existential readings of the parables first proposed during the early decades of this century. Variations on these themes have produced a seemingly endless variety of compositions during this century. Both scholars also illustrate the perduring problems besetting all studies of the parables. Approaches as different as those proposed by Kenneth Bailey (1976; 1980), Breech (1983), and Scott (1989) have to come to terms with the same basic problems. Once these approaches remove the parables from their narrative context, they have to create or "discover" another context in order to make sense of their proposed readings of the riddles called parables.

The Parables in Context: Redaction Criticism

Most scholarly trends generate a reaction, especially after they have extended over a lengthy enough period of time to gather momentum. Not surprisingly, therefore, beginning in the mid-1950s, form criticism caused just such a reaction. So much attention had been focused on the historical Jesus behind the Gospels that the portraits of Jesus in the Gospels had been largely ignored. It was also increasingly evident that the Gospel writers were continuing to exert a subtle yet significant influence on supposedly form-critical reconstructions. These results implied that the Gospel writers themselves might be worthy of attention. Wrede had argued as much at the turn of the century, but his work had been so polemical that his insight was

missed in the debate over his controversial ideas. He had viewed the Gospel writers as little more than unindicted co-conspirators in the early church's effort to cover up its embarrassment over Jesus' ignominious death. Hence his insight into the creative role of the Gospel writers in shaping the Jesus tradition was overlooked for half a century, in no small measure because it had been cast in so negative a light.

The emergence of redaction criticism corrected that oversight. In part, redaction criticism emerged because form criticism had not produced the clear and assured results it had promised. The endless search for original parables behind the canonical texts had produced a confusing variety of reconstructions. However convincing any particular case might be, it could not hide the fact that all of the "Ur-parables" were hypothetical (Tolbert 1979, 15–31). Why should scholars continue to construe the meaning of hypothetical texts when they had the real texts of the parables sitting before their very eyes in the Gospel narratives?

Even more helpful, scholars could actually observe how a Gospel writer had changed his source material. Source criticism had produced a clear consensus about the order and relationships among the Gospels. In this scheme, Mark was considered to be a primary source for both Matthew and Luke. This being the case, it seemed easier to understand how Matthew and Luke had redacted their Markan source than to fumble in the dark trying to piece together a parable of Jesus that might never have existed. In introducing his study of the parables in Matthew 13, Jack Dean Kingsbury summarized the benefits of redaction criticism. Like Jesus, who told parables to communicate with his hearers, Matthew selected and created parables to address the needs of his community. Thus the parables of Matthew 13 are "in the service of his own age and theology" and must be interpreted within the context of Matthew's community and his narrative. This provides great clarity, for "Matthew's Gospel itself, not some preconceived theory regarding the nature and function of parables . . . becomes the norm for interpreting the parables in Matthew 13" (Kingsbury 1969, 10–11).

Of course, in the guise of explaining the apparent advantages of redaction criticism, Kingsbury had simply restated the fundamental and, by now, familiar problem: to understand the part (Matthew 13), one must entertain some concept of the whole. Unfortunately, the whole here refers not only to the complete narrative of Matthew's Gospel but to its historical context as

well. If a narrative is a response to a community, then one must know not only the nature of the narrative but the situation of the community, including its internal struggles and its social, political, cultural, and economic contexts. To reconstruct these matters requires no less an act of the historical imagination than is required for piecing together a context for understanding the work of the historical Jesus. Even redaction-critical interpretation is rooted in the work of historical reconstruction. In short, it is impossible to interpret without engaging in some hypothetical reconstruction, and as Schweitzer knew, that always requires an act of historical imagination.

As might be expected, redaction criticism, no less than its form-critical predecessor, produced a confusing variety of readings for similar texts. Nowhere was this truer than of the redaction-critical studies of Mark's Gospel (Black 1989). The assured results of historical-critical research were no more evident among redaction critics than they had been among form critics. This does not mean that redaction criticism's assets and liabilities canceled each other out. One result was clear, at least as far as the study of the parables was concerned: the parables of Jesus embedded in the Synoptic Gospels had been edited, reworked, and contextualized to blend with the concerns of the Gospel writers. In addition, the very selection of the parables found in the Gospels indicates a perceived correspondence between the parables and the concerns of the communities for which the Gospels were written. If there had been any doubt prior to the rise of redaction criticism, it could now be said with certainty, on redaction-critical grounds alone, that it would be naive to assume that the form of any parable found in the Gospels coincides with the parable spoken by Jesus.[1]

Redaction-critical approaches to the parables had been content to read them either as parables of Matthew, Mark, or Luke or, when informed by literary criticism, as the parables of the Matthean Jesus, the Markan Jesus, or the Lukan Jesus. The problem with this approach is that it precludes concern for the historical Jesus who stands behind the Gospels, the very figure with whom this study is concerned. The work of redaction criticism, however, has contributed to this study, because in an unintended way it has reinforced the need to use form criticism to conduct any search for the parables of the historical Jesus.

Redaction-critical studies produced one other salutary result: they confirmed the suspicion that the evangelists were competent and engaged

theologians, capable of selecting, editing, and creating materials to serve their ideological and practical purposes. Even when scholars differed over details or larger thematic issues, their conversations confirmed the creative role of the evangelists in shaping and reshaping their traditional materials. It will not do to ignore the powerful influence that the Gospel writers have exercised over subsequent readings of the parables. As the discussion in chapter 1 has already indicated, the failure to take seriously the "theologorical" readings of the parables developed by the Gospel writers often led to the repetition of their theology even after the parable had been detached from its narrative context. Clarifying the perspectives of the evangelists revealed how much form-critical work remained indebted to the theology of the Gospel writers, in subtle and often unacknowledged ways.[2]

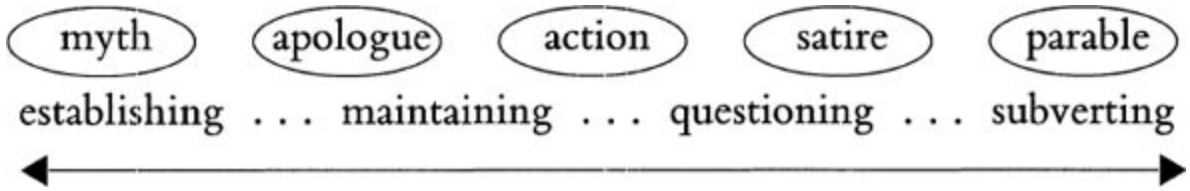
Parable and Gospel: Historical Jesus and Evangelists' Jesus

If, as Hans Gadamer (1975) has proposed, the process of interpretation brings together the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of a text, then one limiting condition placed on all interpretations of Gospel texts is the limitation imposed by the horizons of the evangelists. This applies to their image of Jesus as well as to their readings of the parables. While this limitation may not be strictly confined to four canonical images—a Matthean Jesus, a Markan Jesus, a Lukan Jesus, and a Johannine Jesus (if they could be defined in some clear way)—it does pose serious problems owing to the nature of the Gospels themselves.

In exploring what he called "a theology of story," Crossan (1975) identified a basic contradiction between parable and Gospel. His work was indebted to a study by Sheldon Sacks (1967) of the relation between "fiction and the shape of belief." Sacks argued that fictional forms serve different functions within their social setting. He focused his attention on what he considered to be the three most important forms: satire, apologue, and action. Satire ridicules some elements of its social world to expose that world's contradictions and deflate its pretense. Apologue illustrates some truth that can be formulated in other terms and defended on other grounds. Apologue is a truth incarnated in a story whose telling reinforces the convictions of those who hear it, much like Aesop's fables, an allegory such as *Pilgrim's Progress*, or an "example story." Action presents characters and

follows their fates through changing fortunes; its premises are more tentative and its course of events more uncertain. Works of action, like novels, explore possibilities.

Crossan expanded Sacks's typology by adding two other literary forms, myth and parable. Myths are the foundational stories that constitute and legitimate a social world, whereas parables are the most subversive literary forms, whose goal is to undermine the world in which they are spoken. The fictional forms can be arranged as follows:



The line indicates the relationship of each form to the social construction of reality in which it lives. Crossan sums up the function of each form in aphoristic fashion: "Myth establishes world. Apologue defends world. Action investigates world. Satire attacks world. Parable subverts world" (1975, 59; my diagram is based on his fig. 2).

What has this to do with the study of the parables and their relationship to their settings in the Gospels? The Gospels as literary forms were community-constituting and community-defending documents. They are both foundational histories (myth) and apologetic narratives (apologue). As the parables were integrated into the narratives of the evangelists, they were placed in the service of these larger purposes, and the horizon of the parables was made to fit within the horizon of the Gospel writers. The same could be said of the images of Jesus presented in the parables. As long as the purpose of the parables and the direction of Jesus' public activity were congruent with the purposes of the evangelists, the interpreting of one could count as construing the other. But what if the parables served more subversive or satiric purposes, not within the horizon of possibilities contemplated by the Gospel writers? Or what if the public activity of Jesus justified the charges for which he was tried, humiliated, and executed? The framings provided by the Gospel writers not only contextualized individual units of tradition (Schmidt 1919) but encompassed the entire tradition itself. This is reason enough not to pursue literary forms of criticism in the present study. Insofar as literary criticisms limit themselves to the tasks they profess to undertake, they are devoted to explicating the horizon of the Gospel and

its text segments. This study proposes to explore the parables and public work of the Jesus who stands behind the Gospels and whose life and work generated them.

To the degree that the public work of the historical Jesus can be separated from the portrayals of him in the Gospels, the disjuncture poses the possibility that the traditions contained in the Gospels may contain other horizons that coincide neither with the purview of the Gospel writers nor with the theological, christological, philosophical, and ethical interests of the interpreters of the Gospels. But how could this be known?

The Dialectical Relationship between the Part and the Whole: The Parables of the Historical Jesus

Portions of chapter 1 and chapter 2 argued that any reading of the parables of Jesus was situated within a larger understanding of the purpose of Jesus' public activity. The section of this chapter devoted to redaction criticism made a similar argument. How can one interpret the parables in Matthew 13 unless one has some grasp of the structure of Matthew's whole Gospel and of the needs and context of the community for which it was written? Chapter 4 notes that Dodd's belief that the parables offer us glimpses of everyday life necessitates the reconstruction of the social whole of which the fleeting glimpses are a part. Otherwise, such glimpses remain isolated and contextless scenes, little more than postcards of local color and local culture to be admired and thrown away. Applied to the world of the parables, this means that one must understand the larger social systems and systemic wholes that inform the specific scenes and social scripts appearing in them. Applied to the historical Jesus who spoke the parables, this means that one must know what larger work Jesus was accomplishing in that world and how the tactics called parables fit into that strategic work. In each case the dilemma is summarized by saying that, in order to understand the parts, one must first know the whole. That statement now needs to be qualified and refined before proceeding to interpret the parables. In the process of clarifying the relationship between the parts and the whole, this study attempts to clarify why the horizon of some parables stands in tension with the horizon of the Gospels.

Schweitzer argued, in a terse chapter titled simply “The Problem” (1956, 1–12), that the materials of the Jesus tradition were too piecemeal and too disconnected to permit historical reconstruction. It was a bit like having the pieces of a puzzle but not all of the pieces and, more important, no picture of what they would look like when assembled. Perhaps a better analogy could be found in the task of reassembling a scroll from pieces without any whole picture of its content, length, or purpose. How, then, could one proceed to inquire into the public work of Jesus? One must entertain some image of the whole by framing a historical hypothesis, and one must test that hypothesis by applying it to the available pieces of the tradition. “There is no other means of arriving at the order and inner connexion of the facts of the life of Jesus than the making and testing of hypotheses” (Schweitzer 1956, 7). Every investigation, then, is an experiment to see whether the paradigm brings coherence and makes sense of the parts. Framed in these terms, the dialectic begins with the whole and moves to the parts. One must entertain some larger paradigm for the puzzle-solving experiments of ordinary historical inquiry to produce results (Kuhn 1970, 35–42). Chapters 1, 2, and 4 contain efforts to sketch the larger wholes or historical hypotheses with which this study works.

However, my experiment in reading the parables did not begin with the construction of those larger paradigms. Prior to researching those materials, I studied the parables using more traditional approaches designed to determine their eschatological-existential or theological-ethical meanings. It was my unsuccessful effort to make the details of a specific parable, the ending of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16), fit the inherited paradigm that initiated the present experiment. The ending of the parable had remained puzzling in spite of many efforts to explain it. It did not seem either just or equitable that each worker received a denarius. One way to dispel the sense of injustice would be to establish the value of a denarius so that it would be clear that the landowner’s generosity in paying a denarius to each laborer parallels the generosity of God, whose grace extends salvation (= the denarius) to all regardless of the labors of their lives. But it was exceedingly difficult to find any detailed or definitive discussions of the denarius, to say nothing of determining its value. The ending of the parable continued to bother me.

If one could not determine the buying power of a denarius, one could at least identify the laborers who were arguing about it. Very little was said

about the identity of the laborers, although diagnoses of their ills were legion. Via (1967, 151–55) read the laborers as tragic characters in a comic parable, their tragic flaw being their obsession with their own security. They wish to be rewarded according to their achievement but do not want their reward to be determined by another's generosity, so they perceive the landowner's actions "not as graciousness but as injustice." Breech (1983, 150–55) portrayed them as the embodiment of what Max Scheler calls *ressentiment*. Their evil eye makes them envious of the others to whom they compare themselves, because they derive their value solely by comparing themselves to others. Of course, they repress this impulse and transfer their anger to the unjust master. But their charges against him (Matt. 20:12) indicate that they are projecting their way of being onto him and judging everything that happens only as it affects them. These readings, whether psychological or existential, were ingenious but unsatisfying, especially when read in light of the fate of the class of people being discussed.

By this stage, the search to identify day laborers had moved into research on the nature of the advanced agrarian societies in which they are found. This research shed light on the place of day laborers in the social and economic scheme of things. Further work revealed the pattern of land ownership or tenure, which provided a context for understanding the owner of the vineyard (the details can be found in chapter 5).

The efforts to provide a context for understanding the details of the parable only intensified the tension between the part (Matt. 20:1–15) and the whole (the varied theological readings of the parable that constituted, reinforced, and attempted to expand the inherited paradigm). Over time, the tension reached the breaking point, and eventually the final strand in the cable connecting the parabolic part to the theological whole snapped. Put differently, the anomalies called the paradigm into question on at least two levels (Kuhn 1970, 52–65). First, why would Jesus formulate his parables in such a way that their characters and events undercut the theology usually assigned to them? How could a scene in which a rich landowner exploits day laborers express the generosity of God and the unfathomable nature of God's grace? The cognitive dissonance between the social scene and the theology ascribed to it was just too great. This indicated that the use and purpose of some parables might need to be reexamined, a task that implied a similar reconsideration of the public activity of Jesus. Second, what social construction of reality was being presented in the parables? If they were

typifications of everyday life, then whose life did they represent? What did they reveal about the larger social, political, cultural, and economic systems within which Jesus spoke and the crowd heard? In this case, the dialectic between the part and the whole began with detailed work on the part. What began as another historical-critical experiment in puzzle solving, to render the details of a part congruent with the theological paradigm that determined the whole, produced an anomaly that could not be accounted for by that paradigm. The details of the social scene being presented in the parable did not square with the values usually assigned to them.

It turned out that the materials being uncovered in efforts to explain the social scenes of the parables provided the raw materials out of which a new social construction of reality could be raised while the theological constructions were being razed. The results of this work are found in chapter 4. The crisis precipitated by the process suggested here has led to the posing of a theory about the historical Jesus, which has been sketched in chapters 1 and 2, and the posing of a theory about the world found in the parables, which is outlined in chapter 4 (Kuhn 1970, 66–91). These theories are tested in the studies of particular parables in parts 2 and 3.

It is an oversimplification to say that one must know the whole before one can understand the parts. As usual, reality is more complicated. It is more likely that one moves dialectically between the parts and whole, gathering detailed information from the parts that reforms the whole and then using the whole heuristically to reinterpret the parts. Unfortunately, one's writing cannot always replicate the processes of discovery, so this work first sketches the theoretical whole, then applies it to the parabolic parts. This study also implies the need to devote much more attention to the historical Jesus than could be done within the parameters of this experiment. That task awaits a future time.

A Way of Proceeding

The following chapters are devoted to the study of particular parables. The parables in part 2 codify the world of oppression, and those in part 3 codify limit situations that suggest courses of action for resisting oppression.

In light of the discoveries of earlier types of biblical criticism, each chapter in this study takes account of the evangelist's reading of the parable

(redaction criticism) while searching for an originating structure (cf. Scott 1989) for the parable (a version of form criticism).[3] This process necessarily involves some reconstruction to arrive at a parable of Jesus. However, for practical reasons, this study seeks to limit proposed changes to the parable and make as few changes as possible. This procedure maintains a recognizable relationship between the canonical form and its antecedent and implies the presence of a persistent continuity even while the Jesus tradition was becoming the gospel tradition. The need for some reconstruction also acknowledges the discontinuities that exist within the continuity of the biblical tradition.

Another reason for proceeding in this fashion can be found in the changes that have occurred in our understanding of oral tradition. Early proponents of form criticism, such as Bultmann ([1921] 1963) and Martin Dibelius ([1919] n.d.), tended to think of forms as fixed and repetitive and of oral tradition as following "laws" or clearly identifiable tendencies. After Erhardt Guttgemanns (1979) called many of those assumptions into question, other scholars began to develop a new paradigm. Reflecting more current understandings of oral tradition, Gerd Theissen (1983) suggested that storytellers work with something like a generative narrative grammar that permits a variety of retellings of the same basic story. This renders any search for "the original parable" beside the point. It is in the very nature of oral performance to speak to an audience within the context of a commonly shared world. It may be more useful to speak of an originating structure, as Scott (1989, 72–76) does, although this study does not use the literary tools he employs. The strategy herein is to situate each parable in the social and economic world of agrarian societies and in the political world of aristocratic empires and then to propose how the reconstructed parable communicates in that setting. Each interpretation attempts to capture what an oral performance of the parable might have disclosed in that setting.

Because it is pointless to argue for an original form of a parable and treat that form as though it carried more authority or weight than its later redacted forms, it seemed practical to make as few changes as possible and to explain the reasons for making them. The proposed changes serve to enhance the meaning of the parable as codification and relate directly to the reading of the parable that is being suggested. Thus the interpretation of the parable and its proposed form are intricately related. In cases where

changing the canonical form of the parable simply varies the meaning of the codification but does not undermine it, both versions are explored.

After all is said, the parables of Jesus remain elusive. It did not seem wise, therefore, to insist on discovering their original forms before proceeding with the task of interpretation. Such a procedure would have left the false impression that the true parables had been discovered and explained. This work may contribute to the enduring task of understanding the parables, but its proposals cannot dispel the mystery that continues to surround them and mocks the arrogance of anyone foolish enough to believe that he or she has finally discovered their secret.

4

The World of Agrarian Societies and Traditional Aristocratic Empires

In his seminal work on the parables, C. H. Dodd (1935, 20–22) argued that the parables of Jesus present scenes from everyday life in which "all is true to nature and life," Because of this, the hallmark of the parables was their remarkable "realism." If the parables are examples of narrative realism in miniature, it is because they drew on a range of possibilities familiar to Jesus and his hearers. Even surprising twists of a plot or turns of behavior, like all departures from the ordinary, depend on a sense of how things normally are. The reason for this realism, Dodd surmised, was Jesus' conviction that there was a deep "inward affinity" between the kingdom of God and the events of daily life, a kinship between "the natural order and the spiritual order." To the degree that Dodd is right about the parables, he has identified a formidable difficulty that any interpreter must take into consideration.

The Parables and Everyday Life

If parables offer glimpses into the world of early first-century Palestine, they also infer the larger whole of which those glimpses are a part. To make sense of the parts, one must have some conception of the systemic whole. It does little good to recreate life in a peasant village unless one understands how the peasant village fit into the larger social, political, and economic scheme of things. The peasant may have lived within the "reality enclave"

of the village but must still have known how that enclave related to the social whole and how other "reality enclaves" (of elites and their retainers, for instance) would impact the life of the village. These encounters are interpreted through "typificatory schemes," which classify and interpret the face-to-face interactions of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 19–46). Every typification implies a larger social configuration in which social groups or classes stand in identifiable relations to one another. Because the parables are full of typifications, their seemingly unique scenes and individual characters actually imply a social construction of reality in which people interact in typical ways. Even the characters found in the parables are not individuals but socially recognizable types who stand in for larger social groups.

All of this means that the parables cannot be understood without first attending to the social construction of reality that they imply. This involves reconstructing, on a large scale, the social, political, and economic systems operating in Palestine in the first century. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to that task. There are at least three ways to proceed. First, one could glean from Josephus, rabbinic and Roman sources, and other historical studies of the era the information needed to develop a profile of the time and place. This has been the traditional approach of historians. Second, one could study examples of other societies like first-century Palestine or of groups found in that society and use those parallels either to enhance the information we already possess or to supply pieces missing from the sources that we possess. This approach is often used by anthropologists who, for example, pursue peasant studies. Finally, one could use theoretical models that apply to Palestine and could supply a coherent construction of social reality based on them. In sociology, Gerhard and Jean Lenski (1982) call this approach "macrosociology." John Kautsky (1982, 17) refers to it as constructing "an ideal type." Thomas Carney (1975) speaks of the task as developing a model. This chapter follows the third approach, with some reliance on the other two as well.

A word of justification for choosing this path may be useful. The first approach has been widely and successfully used by scholars as divergent as Joachim Jeremias (1969), Shimon Appelbaum (1976; 1977), Sean Freyne (1980), J. D. M. Derrett (1970; 1982), Kenneth E. Bailey (1976; 1980), F. C. Grant (1926), and M. Stern (1974), to name but a few. It has yielded an abundance of information and enriched our knowledge of the first century.

But the gain in detailed information and informed speculation about conditions in Palestine has at times been offset by the lack of theoretical structures for processing the data. Either the parts have not always been analyzed in terms of an implied whole or they have been subjected to peculiarly modern social, political, or economic paradigms. The decision to focus primarily on theoretical models for understanding Palestine acknowledges the importance of understanding the whole before examining the parts. Even induction proceeds with unconscious or consciously acknowledged paradigms. Specifically, this study builds on the following two theoretical models: the work of Gerhard Lenski (1966) and Lenski and Lenski (1982) on advanced agrarian societies, and the work of Kautsky (1982) and Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (1958; 1959; 1963) on the nature of traditional aristocratic and bureaucratic empires. In addition, this chapter draws on the work of others whose inquiries provide either parallel or complementary information.

At first glance, it may seem hazardous to proceed in this manner, because Palestine in the early first century comprehended a variety of political forms. Herod the Great had proved to be an efficient and loyal client king, and Augustus appreciated the stability he provided. So useful was Herod that his death posed a problem for Augustus. If Augustus had honored the terms of Herod's will, he would have crowned Archelaus as his virtual heir; but Augustus was suspicious of Archelaus's abilities, so he divided Herod's kingdom among three heirs. Antipas received Galilee and its environs; Archelaus received Judaea, Samaria, and Idumea; and Philip was appointed ruler over Batanaea, Trachonitis, Auranitis, and some associated territory. Both Antipas and Philip continued in the tradition of their father, but Archelaus confirmed Augustus's worst fears, and in 6 C.E. he was removed from his ethnarchy and banished to Gaul. Thereafter his holdings were converted into the Roman province of Judaea, an imperial province governed by a procurator of the equestrian order who was, in some circumstances, under the authority of the governor of Syria, which was an imperial province overseen by a governor of senatorial rank (Stern 1975, 124–78). The removal of the house of Herod from Judaea meant that the Romans had to rely on the high priestly families of Jerusalem and their elite collaborators to maintain internal order and to collect the tribute assigned to them. In effect, this move converted the province of Judaea into a dependent temple state (*Ant*. 17. 317–20).

Even so brief an overview of Palestine in the years surrounding the activity of Jesus indicates the complexity of the political situation. Yet these changes in rulers had little effect on the people of the land who inhabited the villages and towns of the countryside. The reasons for this have to do with the similarities among agrarian empires. Roman imperium, imperial province, client kingdom, and temple hegemony had much in common. To understand how they were alike and why changes in political rulers had little effect on peasants, artisans, and other rural poor, it is necessary to sketch the nature of advanced agrarian societies and traditional aristocratic empires. Once this task has been completed, the chapter will have sketched the big picture behind the scenes in the parables. How successful this is in illuminating the specific snapshots that appear in the parables is tested in the chapters dealing with individual parables.

Agrarian Societies

In their "introduction to macrosociology," Lenski and Lenski provide a typology of human societies based on the nature of each society's "subsistence technology" (Lenski and Lenski 1982, 82).[1] They enumerate the following types of preindustrial societies in order of historical appearance: (1) hunting and gathering, (2) simple horticultural, (3) advanced horticultural, (4) simple agrarian, and (5) advanced agrarian. What separates agrarian societies from horticultural societies, for example, is the use of the plow instead of the hoe, whereas advanced agrarian societies are distinguished from simple agrarian societies by the use of iron for their tools and weapons as opposed to the use of softer metals, such as bronze and copper. In various forms, agrarian societies dominated human life from about 3000 B.C.E. to the advent of the Industrial Revolution around 1800 C.E.

Origins of Agrarian Societies

Agrarian societies represented an advance in scale over their horticultural predecessors. The introduction of the plow led to the domestication of animals for agricultural use, and the improvement of the plow over the hoe meant that the cultivation of the soil could finally yield an economic surplus that was large enough to encourage cultivators to settle in villages, lucrative enough to attract an exploiter class, and significant enough to support urban

centers and with them the beginnings of city-states. Although land provided the basis for status and wealth in agrarian societies, the city became the seat of power for the ruling class,[2] which controlled both the land and the production of its cultivators.

The Role of the City and the Rise of Bureaucracy

One consequence of this social evolution was that cities became the centers of the administrative activities required to support the internal exploitation of cultivators and the external programs of expansion through conquest. As these activities were institutionalized, they produced early forms of bureaucracy. Over time, as bureaucracies became more differentiated, their structures reflected the specialized divisions of labor required to support an agrarian ruler.

At least three types of bureaucracies accompanied the rise of agrarian empires. First, financial bureaucrats became the agents who redistributed wealth by removing it from the peasants who produced it and by accumulating it for the ruler who used it to perpetuate his rule. Because peasants did not willingly turn over their wealth to either a ruler or a ruling class, elites required force to guarantee compliance. To address this need, a standing army was developed, producing the second type of bureaucracy, the military. Its goals were to provide internal security and to support campaigns of conquest aimed at enlarging the land base of the empire. The very highest officers in the military were usually aristocrats, but the hierarchy beneath them provided ample opportunity for nonelite retainers to enter the service and advance in rank. When necessary, the professional army could be augmented by either mercenaries or enforced recruitment of peasants. And finally, priestly and other ideological hierarchies arose to meet the needs for legitimation and sacred legal codification of the current order.

The role of the military is in many ways the most evident, but the roles of the other two bureaucracies may not be as clear. It may be useful, therefore, to examine them briefly. The earliest functionaries of the financial bureaucracies were scribes who were needed to keep debt and tax records, to record trading transactions, and to develop legal codes. The use of writing enabled agrarian rulers to translate their demands for tribute into a

system of record keeping that could monitor compliance and record failure. With record keeping, debt could become perpetual and, when warranted, cumulative.

But scribal retainers[3] also played a vital role in the transition of the usurping ruler's regime from "the rule of might" to "the rule of right" (Lenski 1966, 50–58). The agrarian ruler might have seized control through raw power and maintained it through suppression and intimidation, but he still had to institutionalize his rule and legitimate his reign. From a practical standpoint alone, it was just too costly to use the army to deal with every real or imagined threat. Therefore rulers attempted to persuade their subjects to accept their lot. One step in this process was recodifying laws so that they seemingly expressed impartial legal principles with a concern for justice but actually protected the ruler's interests and the interests of the ruling elites on whom he depended. This process required scribal expertise. Similarly, to conduct a thorough campaign of indoctrination, a ruler needed to control the channels of propaganda and whatever mass media existed, thus creating a public climate favorable to his regime. Closely allied with public propaganda is education. The ruler needed to control educational institutions, which trained the offspring of elites and carefully recruited nonelites for political service. Once again, a scribal class was needed to oversee these programs and implement them.

It is at this point that the role of priestly retainers becomes critical. Just as the cities became the centers of the political and financial bureaucracies mentioned above, they also became the centers of holy places, whose priests justified the emergent order and tended the temples that embodied that order's traditional legitimation. The role of priestly retainers was to produce an ideology that either could motivate cultivators to turn over their surplus to the rulers or, failing that, would justify the coercion of those cultivators and their subsequent oppression by the ruling class (Lenski and Lenski 1982, 171–73). Because agrarian rulers governed societies that valued traditional forms of legitimation, they valued the aura of acceptance conferred on them by hieratic officials and sacred institutions.

In spite of the presence of these urban retainers, the bureaucratic groups surveyed above occupied a relatively small proportion of the population, and the growth of this retainer class could not disguise the great cleavage between the elite rulers and the mass of impoverished cultivators who were on their way to becoming a peasant class. Once asymmetrical power

relationships between cultivators and rulers were well established and plunder had become the obsessive goal of agrarian rulers, agrarian societies began to stagnate. Technological innovation slowed almost to a halt, because all motivation for improving cultivation had been removed by the increasingly ruthless exploitation of the peasant class.

Not even the discovery of the technique for smelting iron changed the basic trend in technological innovation, although it once again increased the scale of agrarian societies. Agriculture based on iron tools could produce larger yields, which, in turn, could support larger urban areas with more differentiated bureaucratic functions and an increasing division of labor among artisans in both villages and cities. But the economy was still based on the redistribution of wealth through tribute and other forms of enforced obligations, whose effect was to leave rural peasants near destitution while urban elites lived in inordinate luxury. This pattern was so well entrenched and so widely observed that Kautsky (1982, 3–9) could argue that these "unchanging political entities . . . have no history." If you see one, you have seen them all.

The Two-tiered Society

In essence, advanced agrarian societies were two-tiered. The top tier was occupied by the ruler, the ruling class, retainers, and a few merchants. The bottom tier was occupied by peasants, artisans, merchants, the unclean and the degraded, and, at the very bottom, the lowest of the low, the expendables, although it included the lower members of the retainer class as well.[4] The chasm between them was as great as the wadi that separated the rich man from Lazarus (Luke 16:26).

Lenski has depicted "the relationships among classes in agrarian societies" in Figure 1. However, he does not account for the three levels of retainers identified by Carney (1975, 52–53). They are as follows: 1) the high level bureaucrats, the possessors of *dignitates*, who were direct players in the political struggle, 2) the scribal *litterati*, who were middle level bureaucrats most often in a client relationship with top-level patrons or the ruler, and 3) the *illitterati*, who were menial bureaucrats like jailers, torturers and porters. Lenski's figure could not be drawn to scale and still show the ruling class, so it is important to imagine the extent of each class as a percentage of the total population. The percentage figures reflect

ranges found in agrarian societies. Typical ranges for each group are as follows: ruling class, 1 to 2 percent of the population; retainers, 5 to 7 percent; merchants, 5 percent; artisans, 3 to 7 percent; peasants, 70 to 80 percent; unclean and degraded, 5 percent; expendables, 5 to 15 percent.

Lenski (1966, 284) diagrams “the relationships among classes in agrarian societies” in similar fashion, as shown in Figure 1 on page 60.

The Haves

At the very top of agrarian societies was the ruler, whose total wealth could equal that accumulated by the rest of the ruling class combined. This meant that elites were continually occupied in a struggle to gain the most lucrative prize in agrarian society, the right to rule. Rulers of agrarian societies operated with a “proprietary theory of the state” (Lenski 1966, 214–19). They viewed themselves as the rightful owners of all the lands and assets of the state, which they could confiscate and redistribute as they pleased. Ruling-class elites naturally attempted to limit such proprietary claims and to establish their own hereditary rights to their estates and villages. The conflict over wealth, status, and power never ceased; agrarian societies were agonistic societies. Elites struggled with each other and with the ruler, always trying to advance their position at the expense of their peers and, once this had been done, to secure their gains.

Rulers took advantage of this intense competition among the top 1 to 2 percent of the population to divide the ruling class and promote factions favorable to them over others that were not. The ruler needed the services of some elites to promote his political agenda because the elites often possessed the skills and knowledge to assist him. This was especially true in the military, where the top leadership was restricted to aristocrats. However, the ruler could also limit the power of competing aristocrats by building a bureaucracy with operatives drawn from the retainer class. In this way, scribes, priests, and numerous other retainers were recruited from the nonelite population base and rose to positions of prominence within the bureaucracy.

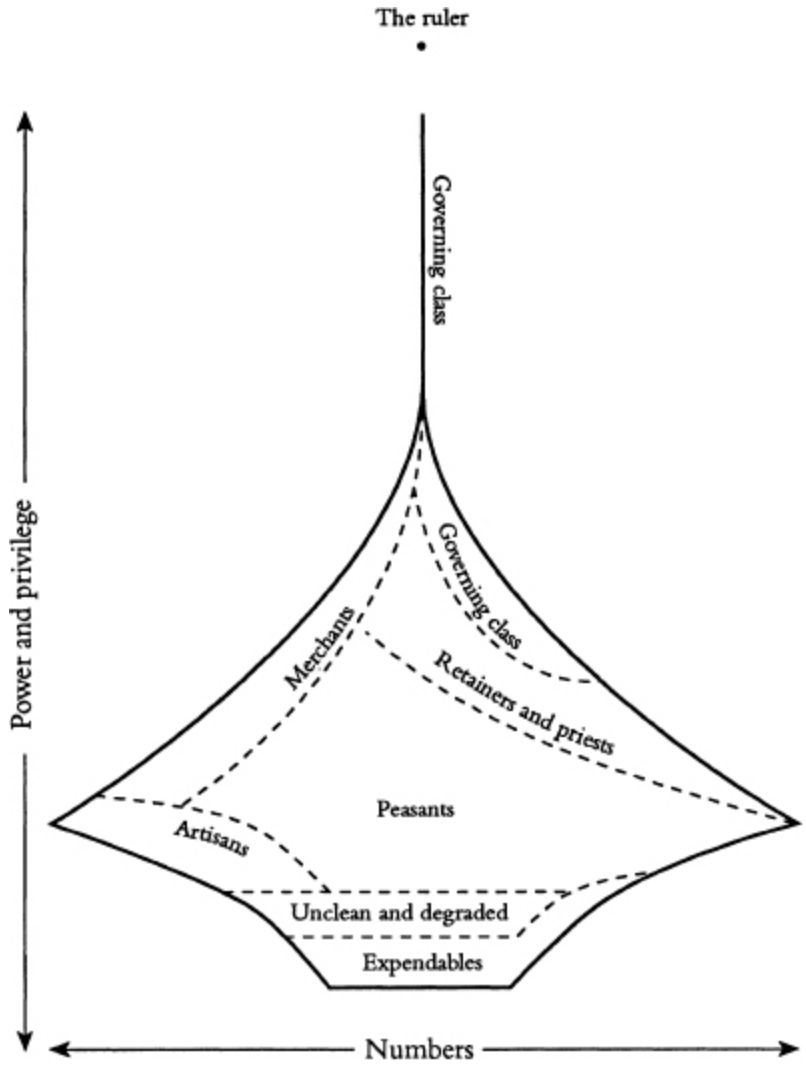


Fig. 1. A graphic representation of the relationship among classes in agrarian societies. From Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 284, Fig. 1. Used with the permission of Gerhard Lenski.

When working in the service of the state (which always meant the ruler), ruling elites used their positions for status aggrandizement and for accumulation of wealth. Political office could be a major source of revenue in a world where everything was for sale, including justice, favors, offices, and influence. As a result of their “honest graft” (Lenski 1966, 224), ruling elites accumulated vast amounts of wealth. If a ruler received at least 25 percent of the annual income of his domains, the ruling elites received no less and perhaps as much as 40 percent of the wealth generated each year. As a result, the top 2 percent of the population controlled between 50 and 67 percent of the annual wealth of their societies.

Working their way up the bureaucratic ladder, retainers imitated their superiors and sought to accumulate as much as they could while, in the process, shielding their acquisitive activity from their superiors so as not to become too conspicuous. Retainers comprised about 5 to 7 percent of the population of agrarian societies, but although a relatively small group, their function was vital. It would be nearly impossible for 2 percent of the population to control the remaining 98 percent. The control ratio (1:49) would be too high for effective results. With the assistance of a retainer class, the situation changed dramatically: a total of 7 to 9 percent of the population could cooperate to control the whole, thereby reducing the control ratio to a figure between 1:11 and 1:15. The basic purpose of all retainers was to provide services to the ruler and the ruling class. They were the functionaries who implemented the policies of the elites. Usually their salaries were low, but they also garnered wealth through “honest graft.” The rewards available at the highest level of the bureaucracy were lucrative, but the price paid by bureaucrats for doing their work, at any level of the system, was also high, because bureaucratic retainers absorbed the hostility directed at the invisible elites. Indeed, one of their roles was to shield elites from popular violence and resentment directed against the exploitive and oppressive policies of the elites. Although retainers worked in military and priestly roles, their most important functions were to identify the surplus produced by the peasants, artisans, and other villagers and to transfer it to the control of the ruler. They were the agents of redistribution in the economy.

Just as the ruling elites posed a threat to the ruler, so did the retainers. The military was always a worry to agrarian rulers because of the possibility of a coup. The priestly class posed a different kind of threat, because they represented the divine order that legitimated and sanctioned the political order. This threat was especially important because rulers of agrarian societies relied on traditional forms of legitimation, which left them in danger of becoming too dependent on the priestly status hierarchies that controlled access to that numinous domain. The hieratic retainers also extracted temple tributes from the population, thereby competing with the ruler for a portion of the wealth being redistributed through tribute. Also, they constantly maneuvered to increase the lands under their control and then to have them exempted from tribute. As long as the temple hierarchies were loyal to the state and continued to produce the ideologies required for

its maintenance, their property was usually exempted from tribute. Whenever their ambitions were thwarted, priests could become prophetic figures denouncing either policy or ruler in the name of the gods, thereby withdrawing the traditional legitimation necessary for the propagation of the ruler's political agenda and continued rule. Peter Berger identifies these two functions as the world-maintaining and world-shaking functions of religion (Berger 1969, 3–101; Eisenstadt 1963, 64–65).

Even scribes could become threats when they aligned themselves with the powerful elites who oversaw large sections of the bureaucracy. As both Eisenstadt (1963, 156–82) and Carney (1975, 53) have noted, bureaucracies in agrarian societies often went through various stages of development. They originated in the desire of the ruler to marginalize competing elites and to place the implementation of his policies in the hands of retainers whom he had recruited from nonelite portions of the population, in the belief that they would be loyal to him and dependent on his good will, that is, loyal clients to his patronage. Owing to this motive, aristocrats usually opposed bureaucracies in the initial stages of their development. However, bureaucracies became institutionalized through time, and bureaucrats developed their own agenda and interests, namely, to increase their pay, to secure their emoluments, to control their positions and the disposition of them, and to advance their careers. Such institutionalization was inevitable because the bureaucracy had to be invested with enough power to do the job it was conceived to do, but that very power created a momentum that could not be completely controlled by the ruler.

The apparatus bureaucracy claimed its own limited autonomy in its prescribed sphere, creating what Eisenstadt (1963, 27 and passim) has called "free floating resources." One important consequence of this development was that the bureaucracy became part of the political struggle. To counter this outcome and ensure that the bureaucracy continued to serve the interests of the ruling class, rulers could appoint aristocrats, independent of bureaucratic control and aligned with the interests of the rulers, to head key departments within the bureaucracy. By this point in the life cycle of a bureaucracy, aristocrats had discovered the bureaucracy's potential as a tool in the continuing political struggle, so they were willing to serve in these capacities and use them to build pyramids of client supporters. They also used the mechanisms of the bureaucracy to continue their plunder of the population, thereby increasing their wealth. In this evolving context, even

scribal retainers could pose a threat if they shifted their loyalties from the ruler to a competing elite.

Taken together, the ruler, the ruling class, and some of their retainers controlled the great majority of wealth in advanced agrarian societies. They constituted the top tier; below them, everyone else lived in subsistence poverty or worse. The sole exception to this rule was a small portion of the merchant class. The vast accumulation of wealth by the ruling class created a demand for luxury items, and a merchant class arose to satisfy those demands. Merchants traveled between urban areas, transporting luxury items from one geographical area to another where they sold them at high profits. Because they were oriented to the only markets that existed in the ancient world, that is, elites in urban areas, they were relatively free from political control.

Only a small percentage of merchants actually became wealthy. Transporting any item was costly and dangerous, owing to the presence of outlaws or social bandits on land or pirates on the high seas. But the promise of high profits continually induced merchants to take calculated risks. This role increased in importance as agrarian societies became more commercialized and, as a result, more monetized (Kautsky 1982, 28–48). With the inclusion of a few wealthy merchants, the membership of the top tier in most agrarian societies is complete.

The Have-nots

Most merchants were poor, itinerant peddlers who traveled from village to village and bartered for a living. The artisan class, which actually crafted the luxury goods that were exported by the wealthier merchants, realized little gain from their collaboration with them, because artisans were a dependent and despised class. Aristocrats viewed all manual labor as degrading, and they considered those who engaged in it as inferior creatures, little better than slaves. As a result, artisans lived on the edge of destitution.

The vast majority of the population, about 70 percent, were peasants who worked the land and lived in the towns and villages that dotted the countryside. Peasants provided the labor that generated the wealth on which agrarian societies were based. The peasants were attached to the land they worked, perhaps claiming it as their patrimony, but they labored for the

urban-based aristocracy who controlled the land and its usufruct. The primary issue in most agrarian societies was not who owned the land but who controlled its use and could extract its usufruct. Thus ownership was a moot point, at least until the forces of commercialization made ownership a more profitable venture than control of the land.

Theoretically, the land belonged to the ruler, who could—and often did—dispose of it as he saw fit. Most elite families owed their landed status to the beneficence of an agrarian ruler, although they tried to convert that donation into a hereditary right. Peasants simply went with the land and were regarded as little more than animals whose energy was needed to produce the wealth that the land generated (Kautsky 1982, 99–102). As both Douglas Oakman (1986, 37–103) and Kautsky (1982, 103–15) make clear, the goal of the aristocracy was to push exploitation to the limit in order to maximize their yield. Because the limit beyond which they could not go was the extinction of the peasants themselves, urban elites learned how to extract everything but the "barest minimum needed for subsistence" (Kautsky 1982, 105). At times the burden of tribute was so great that it entailed the deaths of the older and more infirm members of peasant households.

Peasant life was organized around the household and the village. Economically speaking, the peasant household was both a unit of production and a unit of consumption (Wolf 1966, 13). Every peasant householder had to calculate his needs with great care, if his family was to survive. Oakman (1986, 57–64) has listed the following demands on a peasant's production: (1) subsistence needs of peasant family; (2) the reserve of seeds required for the next planting, with some food for livestock included; (3) the fund of seeds reserved for barter, to meet the needs of the household; (4) the "dues fund," or what Eric Wolf (1966, 13) calls the "ceremonial fund," from which the peasant contributed to village events and festivities; and (5) the rent and tax fund. Of course, the final fund could cover a multitude of extractions; as it expanded, the other funds shrank to the point where their scarcity threatened even basic subsistence.

The more unbalanced the power relations were between elites and peasants, the greater the drain was on the peasants' subsistence. That drain also accounts for the stagnation in technological innovation, so noticeable in agrarian societies. Because peasants realized no gain from higher production, they saw no reason to risk traditional methods of farming for

uncertain novelties. Their entire strategy, focused on ensuring survival, was a form of risk management that customarily preferred the tried and true to the unknown (Scott 1976, 13–34). In the ancient setting, peasant attitudes were reinforced by aristocratic practices that revealed no interest in developing an economic base. Aristocrats were uninterested either in reinvesting their profits to increase production or in covering social overheads. Their goal remained the plunder of their peasant population, leaving the peasants only the minimum required for survival. The entire cycle led to greater and greater coercion on the part of elites to ensure that peasants would produce a surplus capable of supporting the status needs and political ambitions of the aristocracy. It also led to endemic conflict between peasants and the tax-collecting retainers of the elites. Only the inherent inefficiency of the system, spurred by the peasant's desperate need to keep as much of his crop as possible, enabled the peasant smallholder to squirrel away enough to guarantee his family's survival.

The need to disperse risk helps to explain the relationship between the peasant household and the village. Village neighbors became part of a safety net, usually rooted in kinship or other traditional ties, which could absorb the risks posed by elite policies and practices. Villages were closely knit units, governed usually by an elder system. In the villages, the "little tradition" lived and provided the wisdom needed to survive (Redfield 1955; 1956). Aristocrats evidently interfered very little with village life; they showed no interest in it as long as the village paid its tribute and contributed to the corvée, or forced labor, required by the master.

As hard as their lives were, peasants were better off than two other classes in agrarian societies, identified by Lenski (1966, 280–84) as "the unclean and the degraded" and "the expendables." The unclean and degraded were those who practiced what Jeremias (1969, 303–12) calls the "despised trades." Their work involved them in some materials or activities considered offensive or unclean by the population, and as a result, they were either herded into urban ghettos or segregated from the population. In summing up their condition, Lenski (1966, 281) observes that they were people with nothing left to sell but their bodies or their animal energies, and they "were forced to accept occupations which quickly destroyed them."

Below these desperate groups were "the expendables," the excess children of peasant farmers who could not afford to divide their small patrimony. These farmers were forced to send their children into the streets

as itinerant day laborers who might work during harvest or planting season but had to beg the rest of the year. Many expendables became criminals or joined bands of social bandits, which insured their survival until they were hunted down and killed. They seem to have occupied between 5 and 10 percent of the population during normal times, but their number could swell to 15 percent during times of increased economic stress or dwindle to near extinction in years of famine. The presence of expendables was the inevitable outcome of a system driven by unbridled greed. As the elites squeezed the dwindling resources of their peasant base, they forced households to exile their children into the most degrading and lethal form of poverty. For the expendables, life was brutal and brief; characteristically, they lasted no more than five to seven years after entering this class, but the size of the expendable class remained more or less stable because its ranks were constantly being replenished from the classes of peasants, artisans, merchants, and the unclean and degraded immediately above it.

Aristocratic Empires

The purpose of Kautsky's (1982) study of aristocratic empires was to produce a profile of an ideal type of political entity, the "traditional aristocratic empire."[5] Consequently, he drew a composite portrait focusing on the relations between two primary groups, aristocratic exploiters and the peasants they exploited.

Origins of Aristocratic Empires

One reason for framing the issue so sharply can be found in the probable origins of aristocratic empires. According to the conquest theory, aristocratic empires originated in the domination of pastoralists by nomads. As pastoralists improved their ability to cultivate crops, they were able to settle in fixed locations. Nomadic tribes that had domesticated horses and developed the arts of warfare preyed on the pastoralists by destroying their settlements and plundering their goods. In response to this threat, cultivators offered a portion of their agricultural surplus to bribe their nomadic nemeses. In this way the pastoralists saved their villages from immediate destruction but unwittingly established the framework for their long-term reduction to servitude. Once the dependent relationship had been regularized, bribery was converted into tribute and reinforced through

intimidation. When the territory subdued in this way was extended to cover a number of such settlements, the nomads discovered that they could live off the wealth produced by their dependent cultivators, and over time they evolved into a leisure warrior class. They settled down in a location close enough to their sources of tribute to ensure control over the cultivators and began to institutionalize their exploitation. In time, the warrior class of nomads evolved into the aristocracy while the cultivators became a peasant class. Intent on expanding the territory under their control, warrior classes clashed with other groups engaged in the same endeavor. In this manner began the rulers' never-ending conflicts to enlarge their holdings through aggressive warfare and to protect their territories against predators through defensive warfare.

Many of the characteristics of later aristocratic empires make sense when interpreted in the context of these supposed origins. The fundamental relationship of exploitation was established and maintained through the use of force. Yet the rulers had no interest in owning land, only in controlling its use and claiming usufruct in the form of tribute. They did not remove the peasants from the land but kept them tied to it. Freed from the necessities of tilling and herding, the emerging aristocracy devoted itself to two essential tasks, warfare and plunder, the only activities worthy of a leisured aristocrat.

Aristocratic empires built relatively simple bureaucracies because government in this setting was both "limited and decentralized" (Kautsky 1982, 118–43). Politics involved only the aristocracy in an intraclass struggle for supremacy and control. Their primary interest was increasing their landed estates, because land was wealth, and wealth was power. So the sole internal political function that interested them was collecting tribute and other forms of taxes. Indeed, politics was essentially reduced to the ability to extract tribute, and rule was validated through that ability. When aristocrats had exploited their peasants as fully as possible, they turned their attention to campaigns of conquest because expanded territory meant increased wealth. Plunder and booty were the only ways to amass wealth, and both depended on the control of land. Increasing the territory subject to their control meant controlling more peasants from whom they could extract tribute and occupying larger territories over which they could establish their elaborate networks of indirect taxation through tolls, imposts, customs, and other similar means. Aristocrats fought beside their ruler

because they wanted a share of the booty that success in warfare brought. These empires were, as Kautsky (1982, 152) notes, “tribute-collecting machines.” They showed little interest in innovation but obsessive concern with preserving the status quo and extending it through conquest.

Their Class Structure and Subcultures

The clear emergence of a conquering class and an exploited class led to the eventual divergence of two subcultures in aristocratic empires: the culture of the elites, or the great tradition; and the culture of the peasants, or the little tradition. After their subjugation and forced compliance with demands for tribute, peasants were pretty much ignored. Village life resumed its traditional ways. Even if the conquering aristocrats attempted to impose their ideologies or gods on the village, their efforts had little effect. Peasants knew how to feign compliance while holding to their customary ways, and the little tradition was most adept at accommodating the great tradition and adapting it to the world of the village.

Confrontations over culture between peasants and aristocrats arose rarely, because most aristocratic ruling classes showed little interest in either conforming peasant villages to the ruling ideology or removing previous forms of local government. The aristocrats were content to add their rule on top of whatever forms of governance already existed. This practice left peasant villages liable to multiple levels of tribute, but as long as the new rulers received their tribute, they showed little interest in the fate of the villagers. Indeed, it was in the aristocrat’s interest to keep the local cultures of the villages intact, because local customs isolated villages from one another and rendered them easier to control. Even the multiple layers of taxation served a purpose: with so much energy devoted to survival, peasants had little time for or interest in outside influences. Keeping a subjected people occupied, even obsessed, with the task of surviving is a very effective form of social control.

In contrast with the seeming changelessness of life in the peasant village, the life of aristocrats was in constant turmoil. Within their class, politics was both patronage-driven and personalized because aristocratic households fueled the continual conflict. Political conflicts were also family conflicts. Feuds were endemic, and turnover within the aristocracy was frequent

(Carney 1973, 65). These dynamics kept the threat of instability high, for every change of rulers brought a change of policies, including a redistribution of patronage and punishments. Yet these cycles of gain and loss, seizing advantage and losing ground, were conducted within a familiar framework of common values, and although the players changed, the game remained the same.

Aristocratic Values and Way of Life

Aristocrats cherished several common values. The first, "service and duty" to one's superior, was rooted in the framework of patron-client relations or clientism (Kautsky 1982, 169–77; cf. Schmidt, Guasti, Lande, and Scott, eds., 1977; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984; Malina 1988). Every aristocrat was bound in client relationships with the ruler and with peers or higher-ranking aristocrats for the purpose of forming factions linked by common interests. Additionally, he was patron to aristocrats of lower rank. These factions formed and reformed as perceived self-interest changed and opportunities for advancement—or the promise of them—appeared. But the public face put on the intrigues and machinations that silently stalked the vulnerable was loyalty to the ruler, a virtue that reminded each plotter of the larger class interest held in common. It also enabled the ruler to mobilize his aristocratic competitors in time of war.

When threatened by a common foe, aristocrats were bound together by the values of "honor and glory" (Kautsky 1982, 169–77). The aristocracy might be permanent but individual aristocrats were expendable. An aristocrat was bound to act in honorable ways, adhering to the social codes and best interests of his class even at the sacrifice of his own life. Nowhere was this seen more clearly than in the codes of warfare, where courage in battle and fidelity to one's leader were the highest values one could demonstrate. Honor might be bestowed by virtue of birth, but glory could be acquired only through meritorious service or acts of bravery in battle. So central was warfare to the aristocratic way of life that its absence forced the elite to generate peacetime surrogates, such as tournaments, jousts, hunting, and other violent "sports." At every opportunity, an aristocrat had to test his honor and seek glory. When warfare ceased on the battlefield, it resumed in the internecine conflicts that constituted politics.

Having constructed their way of life on seizing the so-called surplus produced by peasants, it is not surprising that aristocrats showed “contempt for work and money-making” (Kautsky 1982, 177–87). From their point of view, only the socially degraded, peasants, artisans, and merchants either worked with their hands or made money from commercial activity. Each attitude served a useful purpose. Despising peasants enabled the elite to rationalize their exercise of power over them and to justify their exploitation of them. Just as the nomads despised the settled cultivators whose products they seized, so their aristocratic progeny demeaned the very peasants whose productive labor made the elites’ lives possible. The distrust of merchants, however, was rooted in a deeper anxiety and had a different source, for the coming of merchants represented the beginning of a different economic order in which profits could be calculated and risks could be subjected to rational scrutiny. With merchants came the commercialization that would fundamentally change the economics and thus the politics of these empires. Aristocratic antipathy toward merchants seemed to intuit the increasingly important role of merchants in a changing social and political order.

Merchants were also indispensable to one of the great pursuits of the aristocracy, “conspicuous consumption and display of wealth” (Kautsky 1982, 187–97), because the merchant class supplied the luxury items needed for social competition. In this way, aristocrats became dependent on merchants and found themselves in a socially structured relationship that they could not control. As leisure freed the aristocrat to pursue warfare and political intrigue, accumulated wealth drove him to consume and display it for purposes of social advantage, and as the values of honor and glory dictated the rules of warfare, the practice of waste and excess dictated the etiquette of consumption. The braver the better on the battlefield; the more the better in society. Social occasions were contests of consumption on which no expense could be spared. This principle applied to the clothes worn, the furnishings provided, the food and drink served, and the gifts given. Even the size of one’s household entourage could generate competition. The more servants one had and the more specialized their jobs, the higher one’s social standing would be. Of course, this practice replicated the ways of the royal court, as well as competed with it, and the development of household entourages may contain the origins of the household-based bureaucracies that would develop at a later time in the

houses of aristocratic families. As always, the practices of the ruling class imitated the practices of the ruler.

The logic of consumption was dictated by the aristocrats' contempt for everyone in society except themselves. They could never spend money to alleviate the suffering of peasants who were degraded beasts, little better than chattel. The same contempt influenced their view of artisans who made the objects that filled their world. Merchants were already making a large enough profit to be suspicious, and money making was a dishonorable venture. Who was left on whom the elites could lavish their wealth?

Aristocratic disdain for other groups in society was complemented by the ruling class's own confident sense of superiority, which was buttressed through the use of symbols on coats of arms and the conferring of titles. Claims to biological superiority were traced through bloodlines and physical characteristics, and appeals to cultural superiority were based in the aristocracy's language, elaborate etiquette and protocols, literature and art, and encoded preferential treatment under the law (Kautsky 1982, 197–210). Their own origins as conquering nomads, appropriately transformed into mythicized history, added to their arrogance. When contempt was combined with arrogance, it created a condition that Kautsky (1982, 202–3) calls "superstratification." A superstratified society essentially breaks down into two classes of people: a lower class that was "subservient, docile, submissive, servile, lacking character, spineless, masochistic," opposed to an upper class that was "domineering, haughty, proud, arrogant, hard, cruel, sadistic."

Commercialization and Bureaucratization

It is unlikely that any of the political systems extant in Palestine during the early first century were examples of the ideal type described by Kautsky, although their vestiges were very much visible in Roman rule, Herodian rule, provincial administration, and Temple hegemony. In part, two developments account for the evolution of the traditional aristocratic empire into the political systems and empires that existed by the first century. These developments were commercialization and bureaucratization.

The system described by Kautsky was limited in scope. It could remain intact only as long as empires could remain loose, decentralized provinces, close enough to a royal court or city to be controlled by its military threat, and only as long as rulers were content to focus their energies on increasing tribute and controlling aristocratic competitors. If a ruler formulated a political agenda not necessarily congruent with traditional aristocratic values or if the geographical expanse of the empire became too large for informal controls to work effectively, then bureaucratization was inevitable.

The coming of bureaucracy transformed the dynamics of empire, because rulers were required to recruit large numbers of nonelites and introduce them into the political struggle. This led to the development of a retainer class, whose specialized knowledge and skills, combined with the power granted to the bureaucracy to conduct its business, generated a reservoir of free-floating resources not attached to any aristocrat through particularistic ties, such as kinship or geography. The introduction of retainers posed no threat to the basic system of exploitation. The retainers believed in the system, and in imitation of their overlords, they practiced it to the degree feasible for their positions. But they did pose a potential threat, because the rise of bureaucratic retainers enlarged the group of people on whom elites relied to maintain their power. The task of ruling was so complex that it could not be completely staffed by the offspring of elites.

Changes occurred in the economic sphere as well as in the political sphere. In the traditional aristocratic empire, the economy was almost completely defined by self-contained, self-sustaining, traditional units of production, namely, the peasant household and the peasant village. Because it was in the interests of ruling aristocrats to keep these units of production isolated from each other, the units remained undifferentiated; and because ruling aristocrats extracted an agricultural surplus to waste in conspicuous consumption and status display, they were indifferent to other forms of wealth.

The emergence of merchants changed both factors. The demand for luxury items led to specialization among artisans, and the merchant’s demand for currency rather than barter led to an increased interest in money. Crops were valued for the cash they could command, and the need for currency changed how aristocrats viewed land. Wealth was no longer simply equated with the usufruct of the land and the control of the peasants who produced the yields from the land. If the land could produce a cash

crop, then peasants were seen as a hindrance to profit in two ways. First, their ancestral claims to the land they worked blocked attempts to alienate land and transfer it to the control of elites. Even if peasants did produce a cash crop, they represented a social overhead that could be reduced by alienating them from their land and reducing them to more extreme forms of servitude. Second, the removal of peasants from their land would allow aristocrats to convert land to more profitable uses rather than permit peasants to devote their patrimonies to the mixed grains and legumes so necessary for their survival. In this way, wealthy landowners created "enclave economies" in response to new export markets. Jeffery Paige (1975, 2) defines these enclave economies as "a commercial export enclave in the midst of a large subsistence population."

Once an agrarian economy was monetized, it became easier to remove peasants from their land. Before monetization, when rents were calculated as a proportion of a crop, they could be recalculated to reflect changing conditions during a growing season. Bailey (1976, 100–101) thinks that the action of the dishonest steward in reducing the rents of the debtors assumed this practice (Luke 16:5–7). If the contract could not be honored at the harvest, the peasant could always carry over his debt to the next year. How else could he pay his debt except by remaining on the land? However, when the use of money reached the village level, a landowner could demand rent in cash, not in kind. Peasants were then liable not for a fixed amount of the yield specified in a contract but for a monetized sum based on the changing value of their crop as a commodity. At the very best, the peasant was subjected to larger economic pressures over which his village had virtually no control, because his crop no longer had a straightforward value by weight but was a commodity subjected to changing valuation in a larger economic system. In this setting, the failure to repay a loan led to foreclosure and removal from the land. The land so confiscated was then added to the holdings of the elite who provided the loan.

The monetization of an agrarian economy created even more predatory forms of taxation. Because taxes could be calculated in terms of the monetary value of crops and the monetary value of crops could be manipulated, it was possible to use taxation as a means to alienate peasants from their land. The value of the seeds borrowed to plant a crop was not calculated in terms of their potential yield but in monetary terms, so the annual debt incurred just to plant a crop was also a variable, subject to the

manipulation of the lender. The entire system placed new power in the hands of a monetized elite. It also fundamentally changed the social and power relations that had existed in aristocratic empires by removing from peasants even the little power they had to hide portions of their harvests from tax collectors. As a result, peasants were debased even further.

The World of the Parables

These studies of the social world of agrarian societies and the political world of commercialized and bureaucratized aristocratic empires provide a whole gestalt within which to locate the specific scenes sketched in individual parables. Palestine in the first century was an advanced agrarian society, whether the political form of that society was the client kingdom of Herod Antipas, the province of Judaea under the hegemony of the Temple and the Jerusalem elites, or the colonial administration of an imperial province.

To the degree that this proposal is true, the figures who appear in the parables can be associated with the social types who inhabited agrarian societies, and in subsequent chapters, they are often read in this light. The values that informed aristocrats, their bureaucrats, and the peasantry are evident in the parables, and the plight of the unclean and degraded and the expendables appears in the parables as well. Whatever larger social, political, or theological purposes the parables may express, they need to be read first as scenes from the larger world of agrarian society and the political control of aristocratic rule.

The chapters devoted to specific parables in part 2 and part 3 subject this proposal to detailed examination.

PART 2

Unmasking the World of Oppression: Posing the Problems

Part 2 of this study examines five parables that codify various aspects of the oppressive social systems that dominated the rural populace of Palestine. Each parable poses problems for its hearers and invites their engagement in defining the problems as well as their participation in discussing them. Like the codifications used by a modern educator, the parables of Jesus were meant to initiate active conversation.

Each parable deals with a number of closely related issues that, taken together, begin to delineate some of the generative themes of the time, at least as perceived by Jesus the parabler, pedagogue of the oppressed and prophetic political critic. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–15) deals with the ideologies used to blame the victim and to keep day laborers separated and paralyzed by self-hatred. It opens up these larger themes by portraying an everyday event, the hiring of day laborers to work in a vineyard at harvest. The second vineyard parable, the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1–12 and parallels), codifies the spiral of violence with a special eye to the phenomenon of peasant revolt. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) explores the chasm that separates rich and poor as well as the ideological justifications of that chasm. The next two parables, the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23–35) and the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30 and Luke 19:11–27), explore the role of retainers in the larger social construction of reality. The first of these two parables also subjects popular messianic expectations to a prophetic critique, while the second examines the apparently futile effort of a whistleblower to change business as usual.

This cluster of parables by no means exhausts the possibilities available for reading Jesus' parables in the manner pursued here, but it provides some glimpse of the benefits of this approach. The parables correspond roughly with what Paulo Freire calls "first-level codifications," whose primary purpose is unmasking the world of oppression.

5

Blaming the Victims of Oppression

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16)

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is found only in Matthew, who inserted it into a section of his Gospel in which he was following Mark. Matthew 19:1–30 parallels Mark 10:1–31, leading up to the parable, and Matt. 20:17–34 parallels Mark 10:32–52, leading away from it. The Matthean context is important to notice because Matthew has exerted a profound and pervasive though "subtle and unnoticed influence" (Scott 1989, 284) on subsequent readings of the parable. The virtual agreement among interpreters about the meaning of the parable testifies to the success of Matthew's interpretation of it. It is important, then, to know what interpretive steps Matthew took in construing the parable he received from the Jesus tradition and how those steps have shaped twentieth-century readings of the parable.

The Matthean Reading of the Parable

Immediately preceding the parable, Jesus encounters the rich ruler and challenges him with the demands of discipleship (Matt. 19:16–22), comments about the obstacles posed by riches (19:23–24), and finally responds to the disciples' general astonishment at what they have seen and heard, as well as to Peter's specific question about the benefits of

discipleship (19:25–30). Matthew appears to have inserted the parable at this point to illustrate Jesus' saying "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (19:30). As if to guide his readers, Matthew concluded the parable with a variant of the Markan saying, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" (20:16), thereby stitching his insertion back onto the Markan narrative fabric. Situated as it is between these two versions of the saying about the last and the first, the parable provides a kingdom perspective on the issues being discussed and anticipates the important cluster of sayings in 20:25–28.

Matthew invested key elements of the parable with theological values. His introductory formula, "for the reign of heaven is like," a distinctively Matthean construction, signaled the direction his reading would take. The vineyard became a metaphor for Israel (cf. Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 12:10) or the church as the successor to Israel, and the vineyard owner (householder/*oikodespotēs*), later described as "the lord of the vineyard" (*ho kurios tou ampelōnos*), became a God figure. Once these interpretive steps had been made, three others followed: (1) the denarius became a metaphor for salvation, (2) the first-hired workers became either the Jewish people or the disciples who were with Jesus from the beginning, and (3) the last-hired workers became the Gentiles or recent converts in Matthew's community.

It is not clear whether Matthew invested the parable beyond these five transactions. But once these details had been interpreted theologically, they enabled him to read the parable as a commentary on Jesus' saying about the last and the first, although not without a certain tension because the parable is not so much about an eschatological reversal as about a leveling of reward. While this hermeneutical approach to the parable is obviously moving in the direction of allegory, it is not yet a fully consistent allegory encompassing every figure, event, and object of the story. As noted in chapter 2, this selective investing of the parable with theological values is herein called "theologory." Wolfgang Harnisch (1977, 231–50) refers to this investment strategy as initiating a "metaphorical process" in the parable, but this work retains the analogy to allegory.

Matthew's theological compass points set the course for subsequent interpretations. One issue continued to be debated, namely, the extent to which one could invest other details of the parable with theological values. For instance, T. W. Manson (1949, 220) identified seven allegorical

elements, whereas M. D. Goulder (1974, 410) found eleven. Other examples (for instance, Drury 1985, 93) could be cited to support the same conclusion. Once "theology" moves toward allegory, the theological investments become more comprehensive and diversified. Details whose meaning is self-evident in one allegorical reading are overlooked or problematic in another. The line between Matthew's "theologorical" hermeneutic and later allegorists' understanding of Matthew's hermeneutical intention has grown increasingly indistinct. Much that is attributed to Matthew finds its origin in the ingenuity of later interpreters.

From Matthew's Parable to Jesus' Parable

Even when discussing the parable in the context of Jesus' ministry, its interpreters achieved a broad consensus that was indebted to Matthew's construal of it: Jesus addressed the parable to the grumbling workers, whoever they were understood to be (Pharisees, scribes, or other opponents), and it proclaimed God's grace and goodness to those who, like the disgruntled workers, insisted on works and merit. There is an astonishing agreement on this point, as numerous readings of the parable show. In the first thoroughgoing effort to apply form criticism to the parables, C. H. Dodd (1935, 95) concluded that the parable expressed "Jesus' retort to the complaints of the legally minded who cavilled at Him as the friend of publicans and sinners." Nearly thirty years later, Joachim Jeremias ([1947] 1963) argued that the parable was used by Jesus as a weapon of controversy to vindicate the gospel against its scribal opponents, who resembled the murmurers (the first-hired workers). Over time, the work of Dodd and Jeremias generated a substantial body of commentary that continued to agree with them in substance while differing in specifics. Both Eta Linnemann (1966, 86) and Norman Perrin (1967, 117) thought the parable expressed Jesus' response to public criticism of his eating with tax collectors and sinners, but each interpreter developed a distinctive reading of the parable's message. More recently, John Donahue (1988, 82, 83) argued that the parable's original setting could be found in Jesus' defense of "his proclamation of God's love and forgiveness to outcasts and sinners." In every case, the first-hired workers are identified with Jesus' historical

opponents, once again illustrating how firmly set the line of interpretation had become.

The controlling power of this received paradigm can be gauged by examining the works of those who have consciously tried to find new approaches to the parable through the use of various forms of literary criticism. Dan Via (1967), John Dominic Crossan (1973), and Bernard Scott (1989) all employed literary-critical tools to open new avenues of approach to the parable. Yet for Via (1967, 147–55), the first-hired workers became "blocking characters" unable to comprehend the incalculable generosity of the vineyard owner; for Crossan (1973, 111–15), they became stand-ins for the uncomprehending reader, whose "understanding of graciousness" itself is shattered by the parable; and for Scott (1989, 281–98), they failed to understand that the call to work in the vineyard, not the wage they were paid, was the moment of grace.

In their distinctive ways, Via, Crossan, and Scott either repeated or varied themes already well known to twentieth-century interpreters of the parable. Their literary approaches seem little more than alternate routes up the same mountain. When these interpreters reach the summit, they find themselves in the company of those who have traveled other interpretive paths only to congregate at the same point because, following Matthew's lead, they have all assumed that the owner of the vineyard is a God figure. The meaning of the parable can be found by figuring out how to justify the owner's concluding words and vilify the workers. However pervasive the sense of unfairness at the end of the parable might have been, interpreters ignored the workers' voices so that the action of the owner could be construed as an example of God's gracious, generous goodness.

The Form of Jesus' Parable

The history of interpretation of this parable reveals a consensus not only about its meaning but also about its form. The concluding saying in v. 16 is a free-floating logion (cf. Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30) and, as such, is generally agreed to be a Matthean addition to the basic parable of Jesus found in Matt. 20:1–15. On this matter there is nearly unanimous consent, although more recently Crossan (1973, 113–14) argued that Jesus concluded the parable with the question in 20:13, and Scott (1989, 285–89) contended on formal grounds that the parable closed at 20:14a, "since

without v. 14a the parable has no ending." In this position, Scott occupies common ground with Via (1974, 125), who also finds in v. 14a an appropriate ending for the parable. But Via is forced to this conclusion because he wants to deny that the householder gives "the parable its formal shape" (1967, 150); this tragic parable belongs to the grumbling workers, whose expulsion from the vineyard (v. 14a) provides the parable's fitting conclusion. If this is the case, then the shift in focus to the owner's generosity (vv. 14b–15) can only detract from the lessons embodied by the workers and distract hearers from the message contained in their failure. Scott's reason for concluding the parable at v. 14a is less clear. He believes that the parable's punch line "relativizes wages as the basis of relationships" (1989, 296) by treating all alike. The invitation to work in the vineyard conveyed the word of grace, not the wages paid for work done. To focus on the wages is to miss the larger invitation, and because the "friend" who grumbled at the householder cannot see past the denarius in his hand, he is invited to leave the vineyard, a milder form of expulsion from the garden than Via envisioned but an expulsion nevertheless. His departure reinforces the point of the parable, namely, "that invitation, not justice, is the way of the kingdom" (Scott 1989, 298).

The debate about the appropriate ending of the parable has proven inconclusive, and Via, Crossan, and Scott appear to be the exceptions that prove the rule. Accordingly, this study takes v. 15 to be the close of the parable. The final question, "Or is your eye evil because I am good?" (author's translation), provides a fitting conclusion to the parable and is congruent with its story line. It also serves the purposes of encoding the conflict between the day laborers and the vineyard owner.

In spite of the fact that the introductory formula in 20:1a and its close variants are apparently favorite Matthean constructions (13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47; var. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2; 25:1), Jeremias (1963, 100–103) argued that they all reflected Aramaic usage and were common expressions among the rabbis. He concluded, therefore, that they belonged to the Jesus level of the tradition. In noting this similarity, Jeremias was asserting nothing new but standing in a tradition of scholars, both Jewish and Christian, who had identified similarities between Jesus' parables and their rabbinic counterparts (Abrahams 1917, 1:90–105; Klausner 1925, 264–65; Oesterley 1936, 11–12; Smith 1937, 33–34). The arguments on both sides of this issue, at least as far as Matthew is concerned, are strong enough to preclude

clear resolution. Therefore, the introductory formula is assessed here in light of the reading of the whole parable. If the reading indicates that the dative formula (“for the reign of heaven is like”) strains against the meaning of the parable as codification, the formula should be removed in favor of a nominative beginning (“a landowner went out early in the morning to hire laborers”).

The other portion of the parable that has been questioned is v. 8c, “beginning with the last and then going to the first.” Scott (1989, 287) assumes that the phrase is “suspect” and was inserted to tie the parable to its surrounding sayings about the last and the first. A more substantial reason for dismissing the phrase as superfluous is that, following Adolf Julicher, Scott believes that the order of payment is unimportant. The reading proposed here takes the order of payment to be central to the codification, so v. 8c is taken to be part of the parable.

The principle followed in these reconstructions of the proposed parables of Jesus is to make as few changes as possible to the form of the parables found in the Gospels. Following this principle, this study concludes that the parable of the laborers in the vineyard comprises vv. lb–15. It includes perhaps v. 1a as well, but this reading begins with v. lb.

The Parable as Codification

Suppose an interpreter were to divest the parable of its theological investments (insofar as such a task is possible), especially its initial Matthean investments. This would mean forsaking the rich interests they have yielded over time, but it could make possible another set of ideological investments. In particular, what would happen if one were to attend to the details of the parable for the sake of discovering its social world or the social scene it depicts and discerning the meaning of its story as a social script? For the purposes of this reading, the parable is read as encoding the agrarian world of rural Galilee and Judaea. The parable is taken to be a codification of the world of Jesus’ time and, therefore, to present a scene typical of that world.

How does the parable read as a codification, and how does this reading interact with other interpretations of the parable?

The Householder and the Day Laborers

The characters who appear in the parable are not abstract theological types but belong to identifiable social classes or groups in advanced agrarian societies. To understand the parable, it is necessary to know who appears in its social script.

The parable begins with the action of a landowner—a man, a householder (*oikodespotēs*), "went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard." Later in the parable, he is called the "lord of the vineyard [*ho kurios tou ampelōnos*]" (v. 8, author's translation). The parable divides into two scenes, the hiring (vv. 1–7) and the payment (vv. 8–15), and the householder's actions initiate both scenes. At the parable's conclusion, he has the last word. But who is the *oikodespotēs?*

Most interpreters simply pass over the man. So strong is the assumption that he is a God figure that he merits little attention. Robert Gundry (1982, 395) notes that the appositive (*oikodespotēs*) "immediately implies sovereign authority," although he does not say why. Joseph Klausner (1925, 179f.) assigns the man to a class of wealthier peasants or "men of property" whose land produced a surplus that enabled them to provide loans to the impoverished people of the land. His description of a middle-class peasantry in Galilee, however, seems anachronistic and does not accord with either more recent peasant studies (Wolf 1966; Scott 1976; Paige 1975) or research into agrarian societies (Len-ski and Lenski 1982; Lenski 1966), but it does explain why the landowner himself goes to the market to hire laborers. No elite would perform such a chore. This is why Donahue (1988, 79f.) underscores "a surprising note. The householder (and not his steward) goes out . . . to assemble the workers."

However difficult it may be to ascertain, some determination of the man's social class is essential to understanding the parable. Although he is pictured going out to hire the workers, he does have a manager, a steward (v. 8: *epitropos*). Klausner (1925, 180) recognized that the presence of a steward indicated a man of wealth, because a steward "supervised the numerous servants of a great property while the wealthy owner lived in the city or was absent: travelling in pursuit of business." But this description seems at odds with Klausner's assumption that the man was a middle-class peasant farmer. The presence of the steward implies a landowner with

significant holdings for whom a large number of servants, free peasants, and day laborers work. It seems more likely, as Scott (1989, 289) assumes, that the man belongs to the class of patrons.

Moreover, the *oikodespotēs* owns a vineyard, and vineyards were most likely owned by elites because they produce a crop that can be converted into a luxury item (wine), monetized, and exported. A vineyard also represents a major capital investment during the initial four years of its existence when it is not bearing fruit but requires constant tending. The vineyard may have "a rich symbolic heritage in Israel's language stock," as Scott (1989, 290) suggests, but it carries economic and social meanings as well. The owners of great estates increased their holdings through foreclosures on loans, leading to hostile takeovers of peasant farms. When possible, the land so annexed was converted into vineyards so it could produce a product with a higher return than the mixed grains grown by subsistence peasant farmers.

Just as Jesus could sketch with a few bold strokes the social class of the rich man "who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day" (Luke 16:19), so here Jesus sketches the landowner's social class by brief references to his steward and his vineyard. To reinforce the extent of the householder's holdings, Jesus portrays him as making numerous trips to the agora to hire additional day laborers. His imminent harvest is so great that even he cannot calculate accurately the amount of help needed. This is an oddity to which Linnemann (1966, 82) called attention: "It is unusual that the householder goes out several times in a day. . . . Normally an owner estimates how large a labor force he needs and engages a corresponding number of day-laborers in the morning." (However, Linnemann objected to placing the parable at harvest because to do so mitigated the generosity of the owner and reflected his gratitude to the extra work force for an urgent job well done, and her objection assumes that the owner is a God figure and, ipso facto, generous, not a landowning elite.)

The successive trips to the agora serve another purpose by reinforcing the unilateral power of the landowner. On his first trip, he apparently bargains with the day laborers, although this bargaining is more like a "take it or leave it" proposition. If he can go to the agora an hour before sundown and still find workers there waiting to be hired, those workers have no bargaining power. All the landowner has to do is offer jobs at whatever wage he deems appropriate. The third-, sixth-, and ninth-hour workers are

simply ordered to go into the vineyard on the householder's word that "whatever is right I will give you" (author's translation). Clearly, he has the authority to determine "what is right," and the workers offer no protest. When the owner encounters the eleventh-hour day laborers, he simply orders them, "You also go into the vineyard." It is a command that brooks no contradiction.

The fact that the agora is filled with day laborers at all hours of the day ("Why are you standing here idle all day?") indicates a situation of high unemployment. Jeremias (1963, 139) saw that the "parable [was] set in a period over which broods the spectre of unemployment." The workers obey the orders of the landowner because they are without leverage; they have no bargaining power. As Luise Schottroff (1984, 131) puts it, "The unemployed are evidently in such a weak position that they go off to work without any clear agreement on wages and accept the risk of having the vineyard owner pay them less than they hope for." Their very presence in such large numbers bears indirect witness to the process of latifundialization occurring in Galilee. Their wages are depressed because their numbers are so large, and their population is growing because of the increasing number and size of estates owned by urban elites. "As estates became larger, the number of day laborers would grow" (Schottroff 1984, 133). Recent discussions of conditions in Galilee debate the extent of latifundialization there, not whether it was a factor in the local economy. Richard Horsley and John Hanson (1985) lay greater emphasis on this process than does Sean Freyne (1980).

Far from being generous, then, the householder is taking advantage of an unemployed work force to meet his harvesting needs by offering them work without a wage agreement. The activity of the owner is congruent with the general strategy of Roman landowners who hired day laborers only for a day at a time so as to keep them in the weakest position possible. For instance, Cato (234–149 B.C.E.) writes, "[One] must not hire the same day labourer or servant or caretaker for longer than a day" (quoted in Schottroff 1984, 132). In short, "The landowner should try to put day laborers in as weak a position as possible when it comes to wages" (Schottroff 1984, 133).

By now it is clear that the *oikodespotēs* can be seen as a member of the urban elite. He is the owner of one large estate, possibly more, significant tracts of which are devoted to vineyards. His harvest is great, and the

urgency to complete it on schedule requires the use of large numbers of day laborers who are hired only a day at a time, often for less than a day, in addition to his regular labor force. His steward oversees the entire group. However, if the householder does belong to the urban elite, why does he, not his steward, go to the agora to hire day laborers? Ordinarily, elites remained invisible, preferring to let their retainers do the visible work, such as hiring day laborers for the lowest wage possible. By following this practice, elites avoided the hostility and burning resentment caused by their exploitive policies and displaced it to their visible functionaries.

The answer to this question lies, in part, in determining the purpose of Jesus' "parable-codifications." If they are what Dodd (1935, 9) took the parables to be, "all . . . true to nature and to life," then the owner is a problem. But Jesus' parables codify systems of oppression in order to unveil them and make them visible to those victimized by them. To disclose the source of exploitation, Jesus introduces a highly visible elite; to depict the collusion between retainers and elites, Jesus introduces the steward. In the absence of the householder, the steward would have received the displaced anger of the workers at the end of the parable. As it is, Jesus can design a confrontation between two social groups who might never have encountered each other, the elites and the expendables. The parable-codification, more akin to a political cartoon than to the lifelike, natural stories envisaged by Dodd, may stretch the truth in order to expose it.

If the owner of the vineyard has been invisible in commentary on this parable, the day laborers have not. They have been the object of every conceivable criticism and calumny. Their flaws are legion: they are "blocking characters" who prefer the security of their position in the world to trusting the incalculable justice of another's generosity (Via 1967); they are critics and opponents of the gospel who reject the good news to sinners (Jeremias 1963); they oppose the appearance of goodness in favor of an ordered system of justice (Linnemann 1966); they foolishly try to hold together merit and mercy (Perrin 1967); they are envious of the good fortune of others (Donahue 1988), in spite of the fact that "it is wrong to grumble against generosity when one has [oneself] received justice" (Gundry 1982, 399); they overlook the grace of the owner in calling them to work in the vineyard and presume the right to claim pay according to their work (Oesterley 1936); they claim reward for their work rather than "obey without thought of reward" (Smith 1937, 187); they cling to the mistaken

belief that they deserve special merit owing to their labor, rather than acknowledging that "the rewards of the kingdom are not measured by [human] desert but by God's grace" (Manson 1949); and they are the very embodiment of *ressentiment* (which includes envy and the urge to compare, combined with the repression of these same impulses), who "want abstractions to govern human life as they move from job to job, living episodically" (Breech 1983, 150–56).

Who are the day laborers? Schottroff devotes a good portion of her essay (1984, 129–35) to describing the situation of day laborers in the ancient world. By piecing together information from Roman and Jewish sources, she is able to construct a grim collage. Unemployment is high even at harvesttime, an indirect witness to the increasing size of estates and the loss of small, free peasant farms. The laborers' means of support are unknown, but the laborers themselves are most likely "the uprooted whom hunger drives into the countryside at harvest time but who at other seasons look for occasional work in the cities—and who often enough must beg as well" (Schottroff 1984, 130). They have little bargaining power, owing to the surfeit of laborers on the market. Even slaves are treated with more care because they represent an investment; by contrast, day laborers are "a kind of slave at [their] own risk" (1984, 134). Their lives are lived at "the lower limit of human nutritional needs" (1984, 134). The Mishnah prevents the day laborer from demanding too high a quality of food, a reference to the midday plate of vegetables the employer might but was not obligated to supply, and he was limited as to the amount of produce he might eat during the harvesting (1984, 134). Roman landowners such as Cato (234–149 B.C.E.) and Columella (1–49 C.E.) testify to the strategies employed by their class to keep the situation of day laborers compromised and their wages depressed (Schottroff 1984, 132f.).

If one turns to a more general study of advanced agrarian societies, one finds that the information uncovered by Schottroff is indicative of a larger pattern. Day laborers fall into a class of people in advanced agrarian societies known as "the expendables" (see chapter 4). For them, as Thomas Hobbes noted, life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." Owing to the specters of "malnutrition, disease and deprivation" that haunted them, they were unable to maintain marriages or reproduce themselves, but the ranks of the expendables were continually replenished by "the steady stream of new recruits forced into its ranks from the classes immediately

above it," the unclean and degraded, the peasantry, and artisans. The expendables were largely composed of the excess children of peasant households who could afford to pass on their inheritance to only one child, usually the eldest son; the holdings of these peasants were too small to support more children. "The best that most of [the expendables] could hope for was occasional work at planting and harvest time and charity in between" (Lenski 1966, 282–83). Between 5 and 10 percent of the population "found itself in this depressed class" during normal times, and the class's numbers may have risen as high as 15 percent at other times.

The best option available to members of this class was to form outlaw bands. If the government was relatively weak, they could survive for a time, but eventually they were hunted down and destroyed. As Horsley and others have shown, social banditry was a factor in Palestine of this period, which is corroborating testimony to the growing number of expendables in Galilee and Judaea in the early decades of the common era.[1]

The characters who appear in the parable can be located on the "graphic representation" of agrarian societies found in Gerhard Lenski (1966, 284) and reproduced in chapter 4 (see Figure 1, p. 60). The *oikodespotēs* belongs to "the governing class," the group designated in this study as urban elites or just elites, and the day laborers belong to "the expendables." The parable does not present abstract theological types, that is, those who receive grace, those who grumble at grace, and the Holy One who offers grace, but rather portrays representatives from the extremes of agrarian society. In addition, the steward who appears briefly can be grouped with the "retainers and priests."

A Denarius a Day

What about the generous wage that the day laborers received? It may not be as generous as has been thought. There is probably no way to reconstruct the value of a denarius with absolute certainty, but it is highly probable that it was not a generous wage. Owners such as the one in the parable tried to depress wages, and the level of unemployment depicted in the parable argues for low wages. A. T. Cadoux (1931, 101) recognized that the wage was not liberal, but he did maintain that it was "confined to what was necessary for life," a conclusion more indebted to his reading of the parable than to any effort at determining its value. More recently, Scott (1989, 291)

realized that the generosity of the owner could not be based on the wage paid, because the denarius was no better than a subsistence wage: “Of itself the wage is not generous. . . . A denarius a day would be sufficient to support a worker and his family at a subsistence level, that is, at the level of a peasant.”

On two counts, Scott has misread the condition of day laborers. He assumes that they normally maintained families, but most day laborers could barely maintain themselves. He also assumes that they could parallel a peasant’s standard of living; however, the evidence compiled by Schottroff and Lenski indicates that those forced into the expendable class fell below a subsistence level of living and were eventually forced to beg before dying from malnutrition. Jeremias (1963, 37) also observed that the denarius cannot point to a generous employer: “There is no question here of a limitless generosity, since all receive only an amount sufficient to sustain life, a bare subsistence wage.” But he is too optimistic in his estimate. A denarius a day would not sustain life because the day laborer worked so infrequently. Even if F. M. Heichelheim is right in his calculation that “a second century C.E. adult in Palestine would need about half a denarius a day for basic survival” (Heichelheim 1959, 179–80; also cited by Scott 1989, 290), he has revealed only how unrealistic it is to conceive of day laborers supporting families on such a wage. In essence, he has restated their problem, because day laborers worked primarily at planting and harvest. In between those times, they could not earn enough to survive without begging and wandering to towns and cities in search of other work. Providing a carefully reasoned and more optimistic estimate of the buying power of a denarius, Douglas Oakman (1987, 33–38) estimated that “one denarius would supply 3–6 days food for a family,” but his argument seems to assume “the silver denarius” of Roman vintage rather than local variations of it.

Matthew 20:1–7 codifies a familiar scene, the hiring of day laborers. The exploitive and ruthless landowner, however, is made visible in the codification by being presented as an actor. He does not hide behind his steward/retainer as would normally be the case. In a market where the labor pool is larger than the number of jobs available, he offers a subsistence or lower-than-subsistence wage to the first-hired workers before abandoning all pretense of negotiation. The workers are so desperate that they go to the

vineyard at his command, hoping to receive some portion of a denarius to maintain their precarious existence.

The pool of day laborers was populated not only by the excess sons of peasants but also by former free peasants who had lost their land and were trying to support their family through day labor, a losing battle as already suggested. These former free peasants, in turn, may have competed for jobs with other peasant landholders who had to work for the masters of large estates to stave off hostile takeovers. But what marked most day laborers was that they had "only their bodies and animal energies to sell and . . . were forced to accept occupations which quickly destroyed them" (Lenski 1966, 281). Once they had fallen into the class of expendables, their life expectancy was brief (five to seven years at most).

The Reckoning:
An Honor–Shame Riposte

The second half of the parable begins with "the lord of the vineyard" addressing his steward: "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." The order would certainly have raised eyebrows because it is contrary to the common practice of paying the first-hired laborer first and the last-hired laborer last. Scott takes v. 8c to be a Matthean insertion because it echoes the language of 19:30 and 20:16, the first of which is Markan and the second of which is either Matthean or an independent saying of Jesus. But Scott's judgment is based on the assumption that the order of payment is unimportant to the parable. He is following Jeremias and others who argue that the owner's instruction (v. 8) means "that all without exception should receive the full day's wages." If this is so, the phrase "beginning with the last" may have a weakened sense, "including the last" (Jeremias 1963, 137; followed by Linnemann 1966, 83; Mann 1971, 237; et al.). But this reading undercuts everything that follows. Moreover, the concern for downplaying the order in which the workers are paid is rooted in a desire to exonerate the owner. Scott (1989, 294) and Linnemann (1966, 83f.) both choose the weaker translation lest the command be seen as an affront to the first-hired laborers. Thus Linnemann notes "that the first receive their pay last is not meant as an affront," to which Scott adds, "If the note about the order of payment is

authentic, then its purpose is not meant to affront those hired first, but to serve as a literary device to allow the earlier hired to witness the events."

Yet that affront is exactly how the first-hired perceive the departure from custom: "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (20:12). (For an overview of working conditions of day laborers, see Gryglewicz 1957.) What is their complaint? They have been shamed. The landowner has aimed a deliberate insult at them, and they react to it. By reversing the order of payment so that the last hired receive a wage equal to that of the first hired, he has told them in effect that he values their daylong effort in the scorching heat no more than the brief labor of the eleventh-hour workers. He has shamed their labor, and as day laborers who have nothing left to offer but their animal energy, they must respond to the provocation. If they consent to his judgment, namely, that their labor is worthless, then they have nothing at all left to offer.

The wage settlement initiates an honor–shame riposte (Malina 1981, 25–50; Pitt-Rivers 1966; Baroja 1966). The landowner employs his steward to deliver the insult; it would be beneath his dignity to do so. But it serves his purpose and the purposes of his class: part of their strategy for keeping the oppressed under control is to humiliate and degrade them. As long as the oppressed accept such treatment, they feed their own self-hatred. However, even peasants will revolt when their subsistence is threatened. As degraded, now expendable men trying to retain some vestige of their honor in a society that has stripped them of most of it, they are still fighting (as any honorable peasant or villager would) to maintain their position.[2] The interaction between landowner and day laborers assumes the form of claim (vv. 8–10), challenge (vv. 11–12), and riposte (vv. 13–15). When the landowner shames their last resource, their animal energy, he threatens their status even as expendables. They must respond.

This explains why members of the lowest social class have the audacity to raise their voices in protest. They must defend their honor or die! Because Jesus has codified the entire episode to include a visible landowner, the first-hired laborers can grumble "against the landowner." Without the householder's active presence, the codification would have set retainers against expendables (as was, no doubt, normally the case). The structure of the codification has set the stage for a dramatic and unusual confrontation.

The landowner is shrewd. Having shamed the day laborers, the owner denies their charge; he then picks out their leader and makes an example out of him: “But he replied to one of them” (20:13a). “Friend” (*hetaire*) is not a friendly term. It is condescending and subtly reinforces their different social stations, yet it feigns courtesy. If he were addressing a social equal, he would have used *phile*. Taking the bait, numerous commentators have scolded the workers for their lack of manners (they fail to include a polite address) while commending the owner for being polite. “I am doing you no wrong [better: “I am not cheating/defrauding you”]; did you not agree with me for a denarius?” (20:13; author’s translation). The allusion to the pretense of bargaining with the first-hired laborers is now used against them.

In a spirited article, J. D. M. Derrett (1974a) launched a stout defense of the owner’s declaration. His argument is interesting. The value of labor fluctuated during the day; it was cheapest in the morning when labor was plentiful and more expensive at noon when labor was scarce. Moreover, wages would vary according to the productivity of the worker. Good workers would normally be paid more than inept workers. Finally, because Jewish employers and employees related to each other not as exploiters and exploited but as brothers, Jewish law recognized a kind of “notional minimum wage, balancing the social and moral rights of the employer and employee” (Derrett 1974a, 76). The minimum wage was based either on the amount of money required to induce an unskilled worker to abandon his desire for leisure and accept employment or on what a skilled worker could command for a day’s work. If employed for less than a full day, the worker was to be paid the going rate for a full day’s labor. Because the minimum wage must have been somewhere between 0.7 and 0.8 of a denarius and because the landowner wanted to avoid extensive haggling with the shorter-term workers, he chose to pay them all equal wages (1974a, 78f.).

Aside from the unrealistic notions that inform Derrett’s view of the economic condition of day laborers and his misguided assumption that those living on the edge of starvation and disease must be induced to abandon their leisure, his economics (which are, he assures us, “universal and notorious”) serve to set up well-articulated theological notions that surface later in his interpretation of the parable. His reconstruction would have been more convincing if he had taken into consideration the plight of day laborers in ancient times and if he had asked “whose” economics are

“universal and notorious.” In a similar vein, both G. de Ru (1966) and H. Heinemann (1948/49) argue that the wage for the workers who worked less than a full day is generous enough to be considered a “reward,” but they both accept Matthew’s theologorical investments and assume that the owner of the vineyard is a God figure.

The *oikodespotēs* continues to press his case as an honorable man: “Take what belongs to you and go” (20:14a). The spokesperson has been banned, shunned, blackballed, or blacklisted; he will not likely find work in that neighborhood again. This is no casual “go in peace,” as some would have it, but a final and fatal dismissal. Via has seen as much (1967, 153–54). “I choose to give [*dounai*] to this last the same as I give to you” (20:14b). Here there is no question of paying (*apodos*) laborers for work done. It is all the gift of the landowner; his charity robs the laborers of any sense of honor.

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” (20:15; author’s translation). The phrase *en tois emois* carries a double meaning, “what belongs to me” (Jeremias 1963, 137: “with what is my own”) or “in my business.” If the owner is speaking to former free peasants who have been forced into working as day laborers, his claim to the land is akin to rubbing salt in their wounds. How has he gained what belongs to him? Similarly, if the second meaning is pursued, the owner reminds them that he is the employer and they are the employed. Derrett notwithstanding, their relationship is not as brothers but as exploiter and exploited. The day laborers have no ground on which to stand. As John Elliott (1992, 52–65) has noted, the evil-eye accusation is particularly powerful and paralyzing.

An even larger question grows out of the householder’s assertion that the land belongs to him. In his presentation of “the symbolic order of ancient Israel,” Fernando Belo (1981, 37ff.) distinguished between two codes in the Torah, the debt code and the purity code. The debt code originated with the confession that Yahweh had given the land to the people; all were debtors to Yahweh, tenants on Yahweh’s land. For this reason, the land was to be redistributed every jubilee year and debt canceled every sabbatical year. If the land belonged to Yahweh, it was Yahweh’s prerogative to dispose and distribute the land.

The principle on which the debt code worked was extension. The Lord had given the land to be a blessing, to engender abundance—an abundance

that was to be shared. The more one got, the more one was to give: “To give what one has is the only means of continuing to have; people must lose if they are to receive” (Belo 1981, 50). The practice of giving prevented the people from coveting the abundance of others; thus the principle of extension involved a continual redistribution of surplus. However, the debt code harbored a hidden contradiction: “Blessing and abundance engender the covetous desire to have more; this means that the blessing may well develop under its aegis the violence that is the curse” (1981, 54). The formulators of the debt code of the Torah recognized “the desire that is brought to bear on the other’s source of subsistence, the desire that is the origin of aggressive violence” (1981, 44), but by the first century, the code’s interpreters were not only powerless to impede its momentum in the life of Israel but had become its allies and retainers. “This violence . . . is the source of the class system, the enrichment of some at the expense of others, and the formation of large scale ownership” (1981, 44).

In summarizing the ideology of his class, which has arrogated to itself the prerogatives of Yahweh, the *oikodespotēs* utters blasphemy: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” The violence to which Belo alluded is here played out in the parable. Having dispossessed peasants from their land, the householder now dispenses a less-than-subsistence wage to the expendables in a cruel mockery of the principle of extension that was to have been the hallmark of the debt code. Any vestige of the debt code has been obliterated by his covetous greed. This renders his final question only bitterly ironic: “Or is your eye evil [covetous] because I am good [generous]?” (author’s translation). The inversion of values needed to mystify oppression is complete. In “The Art of Savage Discovery,” the opening chapter of a book titled *Blaming the Victim,* William Ryan identifies the generic formula for blaming the victim:

> First, identify a social problem. Second, study those affected by the problem and discover in what ways they are different from the rest of us as a consequence of deprivation and injustice. Third, define the differences as the cause of the social problem itself. (1976, 8–9)

Like the ancient Greeks who deduced from a single characteristic—a different language—that the barbarians were “wild, uncivilized, dangerous, rapacious, uneducated, lawless, and indeed scarcely more than animals”

(Ryan 1976, 10), so modern Americans practice an analogous art of savage discovery, deducing from single traits in people or groups the savages hidden behind them.

In his closing riposte to the challenge of the day laborers, the householder practices the art of savage discovery. It is cloaked, like all victim blaming, in apparent courtesy and concern—"My good fellow, I am not defrauding you; didn't you agree with me for a denarius?" (author's translation)—as well as condescending charity and honorable humanitarianism: "I choose to give to this last as I give to you." But its purpose is achieved when it discovers, masked in the form of grumbling day laborers, covetous and envy-ridden savages unable to appreciate the generosity the householder has shown. The art of savage discovery has justified the fate of another set of victims.

What Does the Parable Codify?

It is probably impossible to reconstruct the lively conversation that the encoded parable generated, but the landowner's final remarks likely would have met with initial approval from the peasants and villagers who had, after all, internalized the oppressor's world. As pedagogue of the oppressed, Jesus would have facilitated their interaction with his codification, posing problem after problem to break their adhesion to the oppressor, to constantly unveil reality, until (in Paulo Freire's words) "that which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications . . . begins to 'stand out,' assuming the character of a problem and therefore a challenge" (Freire 1973a, 70).

In addition to bringing together the social extremes of agrarian society, the elite and the expendables, Jesus arranged their meeting at one of the few moments in the economic cycle in which the elites were dependent on the lowliest of laborers. To ensure a timely harvest, the landowner needed their labor. Yet the lack of cohesion so evident among the day laborers allowed the landowner to conquer them by dividing them. This is why the owner spoke only to "one of them." The banishment of that one served to intimidate the others and put them in their place. Freire has noted that the oppressed tend to attribute to each incidence of oppression the weight of the entire system. When they do, they are helpless before the overwhelming burden of the whole. It is this impression that the vineyard owner managed

to restore in his final speech. In so doing, he smothered the truth that he was dependent on them and, as a result, that they could have power but only a power that grew out of their solidarity. Divided, they would fall one by one before the withering hostility and judgment of the elite. In an interesting article, Christine Amjad-Ali (1988) intuits as much about the parable, but she cannot free herself from the identification of the owner with God. Consequently, even after she has seen the oppressive setting of the parable, she shifts the focus of judgment to the grumbling workers.

The path of the parable leads to a limit situation, the moment in which the two groups confront each other. The codification closes in the way most such encounters ended, but the conversation it generated could still uncover not "the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all real possibilities begin" (Alvaro Vieira Pinto, *Consciencia e Realidade Nacional* [Rio de Janeiro, 1960], vol. 2, 284; quoted in Freire 1973a, 89 n. 15).

Comparing Matthew's Parable with Jesus' Parable

Most readings of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard have generated both consensus and diversity, because they have accepted the theological investing of the parable by Matthew. This tradition of interpretation locates the parable's center of gravity in God's generous goodness, while finding the parable's prophetic word directed against the grumbling workers. The historical counterparts of those workers may have shifted from interpreter to interpreter but included a limited number of options. Whether allegorized into theological or moral types, as has been the tendency of interpreters of the Matthean parable, or identified with historical groups, as has been the tendency of interpreters of the parable as a Jesus parable, the laborers remain the villains of the story. Their villainy was an inevitable outcome of the construal of the "lord of the vineyard" as a God figure. Once he had been so identified, his words had to be justified, and the laborers' words and actions had to be censored or condemned.

The reading of the parable proposed here differs because it does not begin with the identification of the vineyard owner with God. Once the *oikodespotēs* can be seen as a member of an oppressing elite class, his actions and words are open to scrutiny. This examination, then, frees the

interpreter to cast a different eye on the workers and, above all, to hear their complaints in a different light. In light of this reading, it would seem that the dative introduction to the parable (“for the kingdom of heaven is like”) is a Matthean construction. This is certainly my first instinct. It is possible that the introductory phrase is meant ironically or sarcastically: “So this is what the reign of heaven is going to be like . . . more of the same oppression and exploitation!” In this case, the parable codifies the incongruity between the coming reign of heaven and the earthly systems of oppression that stake their claims to legitimacy on it and pretend to be the guardians of its values in this age. It seems more likely that the parable of Jesus did not include this reign of heaven reference, but a case could be made for its inclusion.

This study contends that the interpretation of the parable as a codification of oppression is not only arguable but, it is hoped, persuasive. In matters of interpretation, one can ask for no more.

6

Peasant Revolt and the Spiral of Violence

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1–12)

The parable of the wicked tenants poses unusually difficult problems for anyone attempting to reconstruct a version of the parable that might have preceded the Gospels. To a greater extent than usual, Matthew changes both the details and the meaning of his Markan source. The Markan polemic against the Jerusalem leaders is thereby changed into an encomium to "the others" who will inherit the vineyard. Matthew's version of the parable (21:33–41) opposes the tenants to the others in much the same way as do the two parables that surround it, the parable of the two sons (21:28–32) and the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1–14). By revising the Markan parable and reframing it, Matthew changes its voice so that it speaks to the emergence of a new Israel out of the old.

Luke 20:9–19 introduces another set of complicating factors. In places, Luke agrees with Matthew against Mark (for example, Luke 20:15a, the son is first cast out and then killed; 20:18, the stone saying—assuming that its Matthean counterpart, 21:44, is textually authentic); in other places, Luke agrees with Mark against Matthew (for example, Luke 20:10–12, the sequence of three sendings; 20:13, the use of the phrase "beloved son"); and in yet others, Luke appears to go his own way (for example, 20:9 omits the allusions to Isaiah; in 20:10–12, the sequence of servants sent differs decidedly from Mark; other differences lie in 20:16b, the shock expressed by the hearers of the parable; and 20:17, the omission of Ps. 118:23 from

the testimonia). The agreements between Luke and Matthew led A. T. Cadoux (1931, 39–40), among others, to speculate that the parable belonged to Q and because Luke usually provides a more faithful rendering of Q than Matthew, to suggest that the Lukan version was more reliable than Mark's.

More recently, John Dominic Crossan (1971, 451–65; 1973, 86–96; see also Snodgrass 1974) focused attention on the affinities between the versions of the parable in the Gospel of Thomas and in Luke. Both Luke and Thomas provide a simple introduction shorn of any allusions to Isaiah, and in both, the father sends single servants to collect the fruits of the vineyard. In Thomas the sequence involves two servants and the son, but in Luke the sequence includes three servants before the son is sent, indicating that Luke is still under the influence of Mark. The similarities between Luke and Thomas were strong enough to lead Joachim Jeremias (1963, 70–72) to conclude that Thomas and Luke both pointed to an "original, simple story . . . which only tells of a single messenger repeatedly dismissed by the tenants empty-handed, and driven out with contumely and injury." So read, the parable can be placed within the setting of Jesus' ministry, for it is a vindication of Jesus' proclamation of the good news to the poor. Precisely because the tenants have repeatedly proven their malfeasance in office through their treatment of God's "servants," God will turn to those deemed unworthy: the outcasts and the poor, the unclean and the degraded.

In contrast to Jeremias, Crossan (1973, 96) takes his clue directly from the Gospel of Thomas rather than from a reconstructed parable of Jesus and concludes that the parable tells "a deliberately shocking story of a successful murder." Its simple plot depicts an opportunistic and bold attempt to seize the vineyard: "[The tenants] glimpsed a way of getting full possession of the vineyard by murdering the only heir, and with murderous speed, they moved to accomplish their purpose." Such a reconstructed narrative may indeed be pre-Markan, but to what end was it told? Crossan offers only a vague answer: it challenges its hearers to act decisively, even immorally and impiously, in light of the advent of the kingdom of God. Beyond that, he is unwilling to go.

As the efforts of Jeremias and Crossan show, the status of any reconstructed parable behind the Synoptics remains as problematic as the relationships among the Synoptic versions themselves, a situation that would seem to indicate the feasibility of beginning with the Markan version of the parable. At least Mark's version provides an identifiable starting

place. X. Leon-Dufour (1965, 365–96) has provided the surest and most convincing reconstruction of an original parable, which he finds closest to the Matthean version of the parable, but his reading is committed to an allegorical reading of the parable that lends itself to Matthew's approach. By contrast, Mark's version provides an identifiable starting place not indebted to a hypothetical reconstruction of the parable, although it leaves a number of difficult questions unanswered.

Two of those questions are: (1) Where does the parable as codification end? and (2) What is the status of v. 5? This study's reading proposes that the parable of Jesus concluded with the question in v. 9a. The reply in v. 9b may have been the most immediate and most logical response from a listener, but it probably does not belong to the parable's "originating structure," to use Bernard Scott's phrase. The status of v. 5 depends on the nature of the codification. If the storyteller followed the usual patterns of oral speech, he or she would presumably have used the pattern of three. In this case, one could expect the parable to contain a servant–servant–son pattern, as appears in the Gospel of Thomas, or a servants–servants–son pattern, as appears in Matthew. The fourfold pattern found in Luke, servant–servant–servant–son, seems less probable, and the even more confusing pattern in Mark, servant–servant–servant–many more servants–son, seems the least likely of all. However, oral "forms" were not rigid but flexible, and a parabler could vary the expected form if the departure served an important purpose. But that decision can be made only in the course of reading the parable as codification.

The Markan Reading of the Parable

In its Markan setting, the meaning of the parable of the wicked tenants seems reasonably clear. Set in the portion of his narrative that depicts the conflict-ridden days preceding the final confrontation in Jerusalem (Mark 11:1—13:37), the parable appears in the midst of a series of controversy dialogues occuring on the Temple Mount (11:27—12:34). Adolf Julicher's judgment (1910, 2:385—406) that the parable was an allegory whose meaning commented on this setting has, on the whole, remained intact. In spite of efforts to dispute this conclusion,[1] most interpreters still read the parable allegorically, and allowing for some diversity among the secondary

details, most read it in much the same way. The man who planted the vineyard is Yahweh, and the vineyard itself refers to Israel either as a historical manifestation of God's people or as God's kingdom. These correlations grow out of the conviction that the parable's opening words allude to Isaiah's song of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1–2; cf. Mark 12:1). The tenants are the leaders of Israel, specifically, the Jerusalem authorities; the servants are the prophets sent by God; and the "beloved son" (*huios agapētos*) is Jesus himself, the culminating messenger and servant. Although the treatment of the servants cannot be correlated with the fates of specific prophets (though some identify the prophet wounded in the head with John the Baptizer [Mark 12:4]), the treatment of the beloved son is clearly correlated with Jesus' death. "The others" refers to the emerging church as the new vineyard of God whose leaders will become the new tenants of the vineyard. W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 119) speaks for the majority of interpreters who have had no difficulty in "recognizing who are represented by the characters in the parable."

This reading seemed to require the support of a well-developed Christian theology, and for this reason, the parable was thought to be a creation of the early church. The judgment that the parable was an allegory from the hand of the early church rather than a parable from the lips of Jesus was reinforced by the impression that it contained a number of narratively illogical elements. No father would send his son to the vineyard after his servants had been treated so badly; in fact, no reasonable owner would keep sending his servants if they were being treated as brutally as the parable suggests. No tenants would seriously entertain the notion that they would receive the inheritance if they killed the son, and no reasonable owner who had been treated so badly would again lease his vineyard out to others. However, if these events and characters were serving allegorical purposes, then they inhabited the parable as ciphers for theological ideas and for an ideological reading of history, not as characters in a realistic narrative. In this way, the illogical elements could be accounted for.

Reading the parable as an example of allegorical communication, commentators shared a core of convictions: the parable is a theological statement because the vineyard is the scene of a theological encounter; if the creator of the vineyard is God, then the tenants must be wicked; all the interpreter need do is provide a framework for understanding that wickedness.

Codifying Peasant Revolt and the Spiral of Violence

The so-called illogical elements in the parable call for special attention because they have been the subject of continual discussion. These elements are as follows: the vineyard itself; the sequence of servants; the identity of the son; the reasoning of the father in sending the son; the motives of the tenants and their legal situation; and, finally, the ending of the parable. Where does the parable end when read as a codification?

The Vineyard and Its Owner

The parable begins with a description of a man creating a vineyard, yet neither Luke nor the Gospel of Thomas includes these details. This variance suggests the need for a closer look at the allusion to Isa. 5:1–2. Even a cursory glance at the two texts (using the LXX of Isaiah) reveals that they are written in a similar style yet remain quite distinct. Both texts are written in a paratactic style, but neither in sequence nor in description are they the same (Milavec 1989, 90–93).

LXX of Isaiah 5:1–2	*Mark 12:1*
my beloved had a vineyard	a man planted a vineyard
and I made a hedge around it	and put a hedge around it
and dug a trench	and dug a pit for the wine press
and planted a choice vine	and built a tower
and built a tower	and let it out to tenants
and dug a place for the wine vat	and traveled abroad.
and I waited for it to yield grapes	
and it produced thorn bushes.	

The issue in Isaiah is the unexpected outcome of the planting, whereas in Mark it is the introduction of the tenants. Other differences are equally important. The prophetic parable is spoken in the first person by Yahweh about his vineyard, “the house of Israel and the men of Judah” (Isa. 5:7), but the parallel does not carry over to Mark where Jesus tells only of a “man” (*anthrōpos*) constructing a vineyard. Crossan (1971, 452) wondered whether an allegorizer would refer to God as an *anthrōpos* or even, as in

Matthew, an *anthrōpos oikodespotēs*. These differences suggest that Jesus may not have been simply evoking Isaiah but may have had another agenda.

If the beginning of the Markan parable was not an exercise in intertextuality, what other purpose could it be meant to serve? The most obvious answer is that it was intended to describe the building of a vineyard. As already noted in chapter 5, the creation of a vineyard would, on economic grounds alone, have disturbed the hearers of the parable. Because land in Galilee was largely accounted for and intensely cultivated, "a man" could acquire the land required to build a vineyard only by taking it from someone else. The most likely way he would have added the land to his holdings was through foreclosure on loans to free peasant farmers who were unable to pay off the loans because of poor harvests.

Only the very wealthy could afford to make the investment required to plant a vineyard, because it would produce no crop during the four years required for the vines to mature and an unsure harvest in the fifth year, and the owner would need enough capital to pay tenants to nurture and dress the vines, which required constant care. The man in this parable has enough wealth to retain numerous tenants to tend the young vineyard, a hint that the property is of considerable size. The tenants would most likely plant vegetables between the rows of vines during their first years of tenancy and receive a fixed portion of the yield against their contract agreement (for an example of an owner-tenant contract, see Derrett 1970, 293–94; Snodgrass 1983, 32–33). While it would have been possible for the owner simply to pay the tenants the agreed amount per year, he would have been more inclined to enter into a percentage agreement with them because it would ensure their interest in keeping the vineyard pruned and moving toward productivity. As J. D. M. Derrett (1970, 289) notes, building a vineyard was a "speculative investment" and therefore the prerogative of the elite.

Both the vineyard and the luxury crop it produced were elements of an "enclave economy," that is, the vineyard represents "a commercial export enclave in the midst of a large subsistence population" (Paige 1975, 2). Such economies were typically created through expropriation of peasant lands by wealthy landowners in response to the opportunities created by increased trade. The opening lines of the parable, then, describe this process and imply a class conflict, in which the class of the "man" converting land into a vineyard is creating tenants, peasants displaced from their land and hired back in some sharecropping arrangement. Therefore, Jeffery Paige

(1975, 13) notes, “As a result [of the expansion of large estates] the upper class tends to reduce small independent landowners to dependent laborers.” The power of elites in antiquity was centered in their power to redistribute wealth (which in an agrarian society always meant land) in just the manner it is being redistributed at the beginning of the parable, away from peasant landholdings into large estates. One inevitable side effect of this practice was the degradation of peasants into increasingly dependent relations, as landless clients (tenants) to wealthy patrons, as sharecroppers, as debt slaves, and as day laborers.

The basic economic building blocks of ancient society were the extended households of the elites, whose wealth was based on their landholdings. Driven by the need to reinforce social status through conspicuous consumption and to advance it through status display, the head of the household was always searching for ways to extend his landholdings. The notion that one could develop a fixed resource base through improved agronomy or allocation of resources was simply not part of the economic thinking of ancient elites. They believed that there were two primary means for extending their wealth, namely, plundering peasants through tribute and various forms of forced obligation (corvée) or expropriating the peasants’ lands and incorporating them into their ever-growing estates. Because peasants were relatively powerless, they fought a constantly losing rearguard action against the encroachments of the powerful.

One last word needs to be said about the identity of the man who planted the vineyard. He was probably meant to be Jewish, so that his absentee home can be understood to be a city either in Galilee or, more reasonably, in Judaea, perhaps even Jerusalem. The verb *apedēmēsen* does not necessarily imply travel to a foreign country but may indicate only that his estates are a considerable distance from his household (BAGD 90). His identity can be implied by the boundary he placed around his vineyard. In addition to indicating that he is converting land that “had not been planted there before, or at any rate within living memory,” the boundary indicates that he is also exercising care to ensure the vineyard’s conformity to the laws of “mixed seeds” (Derrett 1970, 289–92). Deuteronomy 22:9 states, “You shall not sow your vineyard with a second kind of seed, or the whole yield will have to be forfeited, both the crop you have sown and the yield of the vineyard itself.” This stricture did not apply to the four years prior to the vineyard’s first yield.

All of this is to say that the parable opens with a description of a familiar process, the takeover of peasant land and its subsequent conversion into a vineyard. No theologizing was required to make its meaning clear. Why, then, did Mark choose to describe the building of the vineyard by alluding to the LXX of Isa. 5:1–2? He could have described the process in a way that did not bring to mind the prophetic text. Perhaps Mark did intend to evoke the text of Isaiah but for reasons other than the ones usually attributed to him. The punch line of the song of the vineyard occurs in Isa. 5:7, where the prophet declares, "[God] expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!" The reason for these unexpected results is found in the acquisitive greed of the ruling class of Judah that produced the state of affairs described and decried by Isaiah. Isaiah's indictment "Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you" (5:8) is a brief but effective description of the process of latifundialization that underlies the opening of the Markan parable. In the cases of both Mark and Isaiah, the problem is with an internal local elite and not, in Mark's case, an international elite associated with Roman presence in Palestine. The elites of Galilee and Judaea imitated their imperial overlords, or so the parable suggests. Klyne Snodgrass (1983, 36) concurs with this point of view: "The conflict between landowner and tenant was more of an economic class struggle than rebellion against a foreign landlord."

Owner, Tenants, and Servants

The exploitive economic situation sketched above did not breed good relations between tenants and the landowners whose continual encroachment on peasant lands escalated the tensions already present in the endless struggle for subsistence that governed most peasant villages. It is in this context that the "servants" must be seen. They are "retainers" in the landowner's house, the household bureaucrats and visible functionaries who carry out the decisions of their master.

In the situation presented in the parable, the servants return to the vineyard to collect the rent in kind, either a portion of the harvest, most likely of the vegetables planted among the vines, or its monetized equivalent, as contracted between the tenants and the owner. At this point, some confusion exists among interpreters. Does the parable assume that the

servants return to obtain some portion of the yield of the first harvest after the planting of the vineyard? Then they would have come to receive vegetables. Or does the parable omit this period and shift attention directly to the first harvest of grapes? In this case, the servants would be returning to claim the master's portion of the grape harvest, presumably to convert into wine. The difference is important, especially if Derrett (1970, 289–306) is correct in maintaining that the humiliation and beating of the servants constitute a rejection of the owner's claims to the vineyard. Then the tenants are denying the landholder's right to ownership by refusing his rental claim. If they can press their claim for three successive harvests, then they can attempt to convert their tenancy into ownership. If this is the scenario presented, then the fourth year is crucial, because it represents the owner's last chance to claim the vineyard. His legal case cannot be made by household bureaucrats (servants) but must be made by a member of the household, so he sends his son. The arrival of the son sets the scene for a climactic showdown.[2]

Derrett's reading of the parable represents an advance over earlier suggestions about its political or social significance. As early as 1935, C. H. Dodd (1935, 125–32) recognized that the parable described real social and economic conditions in Palestine, where large estates owned by Gentile landlords were an affront: to growing nationalistic sentiment represented by the zealots. In this highly charged atmosphere, the tenants' refusal to pay rent was nothing less than a "prelude to murder and the forcible seizure of land by the peasantry" (Dodd 1935, 125). Dodd's reading contained serious problems. First, he posed the issue as a Jewish–Gentile or Jewish–Roman conflict rather than an internal conflict complicated by colonial exploitation. Second, he retrojected the zealots into the affairs of the 20s C.E. and 30s C.E., even though they did not emerge as a political party until the eve of the first Jewish revolt (66–73 C.E.). Finally, he described the events in the parable as though they were part of the prelude leading to that revolt, thereby removing the parable from any setting in Jesus' ministry.

Yet for all of its problems, Dodd's insights were not lost on subsequent interpreters. B. T. D. Smith (1937, 223) speculated that tenants might often have refused rent payments to absentee landlords "or even assault their agents," and Jeremias (1963, 74) noted in passing that "the parable [described] the revolutionary attitude of the Galilean peasants towards the foreign landlords," but neither one found the information germane to their

reading of the parable. While acknowledging Dodd's insights, they were unable to develop them in significant ways. Their failure traced in part to the fact that both Dodd and Jeremias conceived of the events in the parable in terms of the tensions leading to the first Jewish revolt, in part to their belief that no case could be made to support the tenants' hope of inheriting the vineyard, and, finally, to their unshakable assumption that the parable was a theological statement and therefore allegorical. Because the parable was about theology, the beating of the servants and the murder of the son in the false and unfounded belief that they would inherit the vineyard reveal either the tenants' defiant and irrational wickedness or their stupidity.[3] Little wonder that Frank Kermode (1979, 44) dismissed the inchoate insights of Dodd and Jeremias as turning the parable into "a somewhat ridiculous fable about current affairs."

Kermode's sarcastic remarks notwithstanding, the servants in the parable perform the role expected of them. They do the owner's bidding, and they take the hostility, anger, and violence displaced onto their class. Because the tenants cannot get at the protected elite, they turn their aggressive impulses on the aristocrats' bureaucratic agents. The treatment the agents receive at the hands of the tenants is simply one of the liabilities of their job, although there may have been a more specific reason for the first beating than sheer hostility; it may represent a peculiar form of bargaining. Because the owner was responsible for all capital outlays during the first four years, the tenants may have been claiming that their expenses exceeded the owner's share of the harvest. Therefore, he would owe them money over and above the amount they were to receive at harvest time. If the servant disputed or rejected their accounting, an argument could lead to blows (Derrett 1970, 293–98). This might explain why the owner did not retaliate against the tenants. Only his bureaucrat was injured, and the dispute could be laid to rest with time. But the violence escalates when the second retainer arrives to collect the annual rent. He is not only wounded in the head, perhaps a reference to insulting blows delivered with the back of the hand, but also "shamed." The insulting or shaming of the retainer makes clear that more is at stake than a dispute about overhead costs. The violence continues to escalate when the third retainer is killed.

At this point, the status of Mark 12:5b needs to be examined, because it confuses the clear sequence of three by adding a messy addendum: "And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed." Of course,

any judgment about 12:5b is dependent on larger judgments about the narrative line of the parable. If a three-year sequence of rejections leading to a final confrontation between owner and tenants through the agency of the son is being depicted, then 12:5b clearly interrupts and confuses the building tension of the plot and, as a consequence, should be rejected as a secondary expansion. But in spite of Derrett's efforts to make this scenario credible, it does leave many unanswered questions. After all arguments have been heard, the hope of the tenants probably does not reside in any legal provision open for them to exploit. In the general nature of things in an advanced agrarian society, such a provision would seem unlikely, for elites shaped the legal codes that governed their societies and it is improbable that they would leave themselves vulnerable to a reverse hostile takeover. In fact, one would expect just the opposite. The scribal retainers of elites would write laws to support the elites' seizures of land but would couch them in "general and impersonal terms" so that they appeared to support "abstract principles of justice" instead of class interests (Lenski 1966, 50–54). As argued in chapter 4, the elites' rewriting of the laws (or in the case of Palestine, the Torah in terms of the oral torah) through their scribal retainers was a normal part of the transition from the rule of might to the rule of right, and it would surely have served their interests rather than the interests of the peasantry. So it is unlikely that the ingenuity expended to explain the tenants' legal situation was operative in Jesus' world. Therefore, it is unlikely that the tenants' action can be seen as staking a legal claim to the vineyard. This, in turn, means that the status of Mark 12:5b cannot be determined by appealing to a four-year sequence, as Derrett has done, but needs to be determined by understanding the verse's relationship to the role of violence in the parable.

What purpose does the portrayal of violence serve? The eruption of violence reinforces the reading of the opening scene of the parable that is proposed in this chapter. If peasants resorted to violence only when their subsistence itself was threatened, then the conversion of land from farmland to a vineyard (12:1b, 2) would be an event that would trigger just such a response. The building of the vineyard and the violence it generates also describes the conflict of two value systems. Elites continually sought to expand their holdings and add to their wealth at the expense of the peasants. They were driven by the need to enhance their status in the endless intraclass struggle that occupied their attention. To be an honorable elite

meant increasing one's wealth as a base for enlarging one's power and prestige through expanding patron-client networks.

By contrast, peasant villagers sought only to maintain their status relative to their peers. They were not acquisitive because gaining a disproportionate amount of wealth could be accomplished only at the expense of other villagers, and honorable peasants did not wish to disadvantage their neighbors. Their goal was to maintain their status as village neighbors who maintained their subsistence and laid away a small amount for ceremonial needs (Scott 1976; Wolf 1966; Oakman 1986). Their future depended on their ability to remain part of the collective to which they belonged, so any attempt to disrupt the delicate balance of mutual subsistence needs was viewed as shameful. But when peasants were no longer able to maintain their level of subsistence, then they could no longer retain their status as honorable villagers. They had lost the ability to maintain their household and could no longer contribute to the ceremonial needs of the village. Having been forced beyond the narrow parameters required for their survival, they had no choice but to rebel. It is one such small rebellion that is codified in this parable. Scott (1976, 39) has observed that "downwardly mobile peasants may resist most bitterly at those thresholds where they risk losing much of their previous security." Crossing the threshold from smallholder to tenant, as depicted in the parable, represents just such a moment.

This rebellion scenario makes more sense if the first servant appears to collect a portion of the vegetable crop planted during the first year of the vineyard's life, and if the subsequent servants arrive on similar errands. The shorter the time between the conversion of the land and the revolt, the more credible is the connection between the two events. Conversely, this reading would make little sense if the first servant arrived to collect the first grape harvest during the fifth year of the vineyard's existence. The lapse of time would be too great to connect credibly the two events. Of course, this reading also distances the parable from its presumed counterpart in Isaiah, where the grape crop is the issue.

The critical issue is the relationship of violence to the temporal sequence described in the parable. Describing what is now known familiarly as the "spiral of violence," Helder Camara identifies its three phases (see Camara 1971, 29–36). The spiral begins in the everyday oppression and exploitation of the poor by the ruling elites. This violence is often covert and sanctioned

by law, such as the hostile takeover of peasant land. More often than not, peasants simply adjust and adapt to these incursions by the elites in order to maintain their subsistence standard; but as suggested above, even peasants have a breaking point. When their very subsistence is threatened, they will revolt (Malina 1981, 77). This is the second phase of the spiral of violence, and it is this phase that the parable depicts in greatest detail. Inevitably, such rebellions or revolts are repressed through the use of force, as the final question of the parable suggests (12:9a). This officially sanctioned violence defines the final phase of the spiral of violence, which always occurs "under the pretext of safeguarding public order [or] national security" (Camara 1971, 36).

Read within this context, the parable alludes to the first and final phases of the spiral of violence (12:1b, 2, and 9a) but concentrates on its second phase (12:3–8). Diagrammed, the spiral as represented in this parable looks like this:

12:1b, 2	first phase/daily oppression
12:3–8	second phase/revolt
12:9a	third phase/repressive force

In short, the parable codifies the spiral of violence by describing a local peasant revolt on a great estate. This rebellion was too small to make the news or historians' records but may have been typical of the brushfires that kept breaking out in the parched economic landscape of Galilee and Judaea.

How does this interpretive framework affect the question of sequence and the status of 12:5b? If the opening of the parable codifies the daily oppression that leads to the breaking point, then the middle part of the parable provided its hearers with a vicarious experience of striking back: first, the hearers vicariously beat, brutalized, and killed the hated retainers; then, they attacked the son who would inherit what was once their land. It may have been imaginative retribution, but it would still have been satisfying. For the purposes of this reading, then, the question is how long the central section of the parable needs to be to provide the vicarious thrill of revolt. The parable clearly provides an escalating sequence of violence: (1) beating and denying the "servant retainer" any payment; (2) humiliating and shaming the next retainer; (3) killing the third. Whether the parabler needed to add 12:5b to emphasize the extent of the revolt depends on two

factors: Would the sequence of three have been understood in an oral society as a convention or shorthand way of speaking of a larger event? Does 12:5b interrupt the flow from the first escalating sequence, which peaks with the killing of a servant, to the second escalation, which moves from "servant retainers" to the "son-heir"?

Note that the section devoted to the fate of the son is longer than the section devoted to the three servants (if 12:5b is eliminated). This provides one important clue. The most important escalation is the one from retainers to son, not the repetition of retainers. Having increased the violence visited on the retainers from a beating to a killing, the sequence is complete. More of the same does not raise the stakes. But the introduction of the son does. From the point of view proposed here, 12:5b is not necessary to the function of the parable as codification and interrupts the movement from the first escalation (the treatment of the servants) to the second escalation (the killing of the son) by postponing it. The appeal to vicarious experience is satisfied by the portrayal of escalating violence (this is explored in the next section).

The thrill of revolt may be satisfying but is usually short-lived. The parable ends as abruptly as most peasant revolts. Just when the narrative appears to be gathering convincing momentum, it is stopped dead in its tracks with a question: "What then will the owner [lord] of the vineyard do?" The question answers itself. The officially sanctioned violence of the state or of the elites will crush the revolt. There may have been revolts in the ancient world, but there were no revolutions. The distinction is important. Revolts are uprisings that are inevitably crushed by elites, whereas revolutionary movements, like those found in the modern world, have a chance of success because they have access to weapons and political influence. In the ancient world, the state held a virtual monopoly on military forces and technology. That control ensured the futility of peasant revolts, whatever their scope.

The Father, the Son, and the Inheritance

Whether or not Derrett is correct in his reading of the parable, he has rightly noted that the arrival of the son changes the dynamics of the parable in significant ways. This arrival has been referred to here as a second

escalation in the parable. Household bureaucrats may be treated with impunity but not a member of the elite. The father's reasoning in 12:6b reflects his social location and class attitude. He speaks as a confident elite who is certain that peasant tenants, even rebellious ones, will respect his son. The consequences of not doing so are just too dire. Seen within the framework of ruling-class attitudes and assumptions, the father's reasoning makes sense.

The motives of the tenants remain less intelligible, although two possibilities have been suggested. Having carefully constructed a scenario in which the tenants could convert their tenancy into a claim on "the ownership of the usufruct" before delicately and diplomatically claiming ownership of the vineyard itself, Derrett acknowledges that the son poses a threat to this scheme because he can press his father's claim against the usurpers. The son's action menaces the tenants, perhaps even threatens their three-year takeover project, so his murder is a risk worth taking. Yet at this very point, even Derrett wavers. The murder may be based on the mistaken assumption that the father has already apportioned the vineyard to the son, so that the son can press his claim as an owner and not merely as a future heir. In this case, the tenants make a "very stupid mistake" in killing the son because they leave themselves open to the wrath of the true and original owner, the father. For reasons cited above, Derrett's scenario is already problematic, and his vacillating explanation for the murder of the son certainly does not strengthen his case. Although at the beginning of his study of the parable he claimed that nothing depicted in it was "unreasonable" in its original setting, he seems to prove exactly the opposite with regard to the son's murder.

In a different vein, J. and R. Newell (1972) argue that the killing of the son is not a problem if the hearers are in sympathy with the tenants. This would be the case if the son is a foreigner and the tenants are zealot sympathizers. In this setting, the murder is the zealots' way of reclaiming land taken from Israel by unclean Gentiles. The major problems with this approach are the same as those that applied to Dodd's reconstruction, namely, that it presupposes the existence of a zealot movement well before such a movement can be documented with certainty, and it overlooks the possibility that the conflict involves internal elites overdetermined by their colonial masters.

In spite of the difficulties posed by these two readings, both interpretations offer important clues. The Newells have identified the intense conflict existing between tenants and owner, although this conflict can be attributed to the everyday conditions of exploitation, complicated by Roman colonial pressures. Derrett has seen that the issue of land ownership is critical, and the reasons why need to be explored, in addition to a simpler explanation of the peasants' actions. As the literature on social banditry and peasant revolts makes clear (Gurr 1970; Hobsbawm 1959; 1981; Paige 1975; Scott 1976), peasants resorted to violence not to usher in an ideal order of justice but to restore what they had recently lost. In this parable, the tenants have rebelled for the purpose of restoring their patrimonial holdings, a situation that renders their actions and motive (v. 7) perfectly clear.

The son is the "heir" (*klēronomos*) whose "inheritance" (*klēronomia*) the tenants are attempting to reclaim. In Jesus' day, both words conveyed deep convictions. (The following discussion is indebted to Johannes Herrmann and Werner Foerster [*TDNT* 3:758–85].) Stated briefly, the land was Israel's inheritance, bequeathed by Yahweh. This applied not only to each tribe, which was apportioned its allotment of the inheritance (Josh. 13–19), but even to each family in Israel (Josh. 24:28, 32), whose lot was to be protected even if it were barren of male heirs (Num. 27:5–11). The integrity of each family's inheritance was thus preserved in perpetuity. Acting out of this clear belief that his land is an inheritance, Naboth refuses either to sell his vineyard or to exchange it for a better one when King Ahab propositions him (1 Kings 21:3). So sacred is this provision of an inheritance that Ahab and Jezebel pay dearly for violating it, and even after Ahab's death, their transgression poisons the reign of their son as well (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9). One important theme in the prophetic critique of the ruling classes in Israel and Judah was focused on the abuse of power that dispossessed peasants from their land (see Amos 2:6–7; 4:1–2; Micah 2:2; Isa. 5:8–10). Every plot of family land represented in microcosm Yahweh's macrocosmic allotment of the land to the people. Each peasant farm embodied the covenant. As Foerster (*TDNT* 3:774) put it, "On this view the shares of the tribes, families and individuals are also fixed by divine ordination." The hostile takeover of peasant lands, then, posed a theological problem and generated intense reactions, as the parable suggests. The violence that is turned against the household retainers and the son could be seen more as akin to

the violence of Joshua's holy war in wresting the land from the Canaanites than as a lawless usurpation of owner's rights in a peasant rebellion.

In light of the meaning of the land suggested here, the tenants' motives may become more understandable. They were peasants pushed over the edge of survival, and they were heirs of Yahweh's allotment of the land whose inheritance had been stolen from them. Their violent outburst was their way of reasserting their honorable status as heirs, not the shameful act of usurpers. Yet the ruling elites portrayed themselves as Yahweh's rightful heirs and the rebellious peasants as outlaws. Their readings of the Torah justified their acquisitive greed while damning the peasants' outrage. The sons of the elite became the heirs to this rereading of history and reaped its benefits.

The parable codified this conflict of interpretations over the meanings of owner, heir, and inheritance, and the strongly held convictions of the characters animated the hearers' enjoyment of the forms of revenge visited on the retainers and the son. But the final word has not yet been spoken.

Crushing the Revolt

Peasant revolts followed a typical pattern. They erupted unexpectedly, perhaps spontaneously, in response to a provocation that threatened even the subsistence of the peasants. Because they were unpredictable and because they were supported by the peasantry as a whole, the rebels may have survived for a time, winning a few victories. But eventually and inevitably, the sanctioned power of the state would crush them. The codification of peasant revolt in this parable ends on a similar note. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mark 12:9).

Galilee and Judaea were in the midst of significant change during the early decades of the first century, primarily through the forces of commercialization. Pressure brought to bear on peasants through the takeover of land was one important factor. This parable codifies such a land seizure. Oppression generates violent reactions because it continually feeds the first phase of the spiral of violence. But in a world where elites controlled the means of production of weapons and retained the armies to use them, revolts reproduced the impotence that ignited them and legitimated more intense forms of repression. In its closing question, the parable codifies the futility of violence under these circumstances.

Conclusion

The parable may codify the futility of armed rebellion, but it does more. By exploring the themes of ownership, inheritance, and heir, it calls into question the accepted version of those generative themes and undermines their credibility. This is one purpose for the soliloquy in Mark 12:7 that has troubled so many interpreters. The juxtaposition of these generative themes with the portrayal of the spiral of violence leaves the hearers with a dilemma. How can they reclaim their honorable status as heirs if violent revolts always end in futility? Are there other ways to assert their claims?

7

The Unbridgeable Chasm

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31)

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus has most often been read as two parables in one: the first parable recounted the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife, while the second defended the adequacy of the Torah to communicate God's will without the need for "signs." This chapter reads the parable as codifying both the relationship between rich and poor and the appeals to the afterlife that are used to justify the social arrangements on earth.

The Parable in Luke

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is found only in Luke 16:19–31 and, since Rudolf Bultmann, has been widely regarded as either a Lukan or a pre-Lukan composition. Many commentators have noted the parallels between the parable and traditional rabbinic tales and Egyptian folklore (Bultmann 1963, 197; Smith 1937, 54; Jeremias 1963, 183). That a portion of the parable appears to be a variation on a folkloric theme has led to the conclusion that the parable in Luke was composed from parallel materials. Following the clue supplied by those materials, Bultmann concluded that the parable could be divided into two parts: (1) vv. 19–26 were based on a folkloric account of the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife; (2) vv. 27–31 constituted a polemic against the need for "signs" to augment the Torah and

Prophets for revealing God's will (Bultmann 1963, 178, 196). This analysis of the parable into component parts explained its two apparently conflicting messages, one derived from its first part about the leveling of earthly inequities, the other derived from its second part about the adequacy of the Torah. Because, according to Bultmann, both issues reflected Jewish concerns, the two segments of the parable were assigned to Jewish tradition and could therefore be ascribed neither to Jesus nor to the early church (Bultmann 1963, 203).

Subsequent discussions of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus have been deeply indebted to Bultmann. Even when scholars have differed with him over specifics, they have retained his twofold structure for the parable. A. T. Cadoux (1931, 124–28), for example, took the parable to be an authentic utterance of Jesus that was told against the Pharisees as part of the debate over signs, and B. T. D. Smith (1937, 135–41), utilizing Bultmann's division of the parable, argued that Jesus shifted the meaning of traditional materials about the afterlife to focus on the adequacy of the Torah. W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 208–10) followed the same lead by arguing that vv. 19–25 were addressed to Pharisees whereas vv. 27–31, a later addition, were spoken to correct Sadducean beliefs. In addition, he contended that v. 26 was a later addition because the rabbis know of no separation between Hades and paradise. In all these discussions, the parable's interpreters assume Bultmann's basic division of the parable into two distinct parts, as well as his reading of the distinctive messages expressed in each part.[1]

The consequence of this approach is seen most clearly in the work of Joachim Jeremias (1963, 180–87), who believes that Jesus added an epilogue (vv. 27–31) to extant folk material (vv. 19–26), thereby producing a parable about "the challenge of the hour," the theological theme it illustrates. The folk material is incidental to the meaning of the parable, whose emphasis lies in its second part. The parable is not, therefore, about the rich man and Lazarus but about the "six brothers." Jesus told the parable as a warning to those who, like the surviving brothers, are living in luxury, oblivious to God's impending judgment.

Not everyone has focused on the second part of the parable. Two more recent interpreters have focused their work on vv. 19–26, which they take to be the original parable. John Dominic Crossan (1973, 66–68) thinks that vv. 27–31 are a "pre-Lukan [yet] post-resurrectional" composition, whose theme concerns the resurrection of Jesus and anticipates the later discussion

of the resurrection in Luke 24. The parable of Jesus is “a strikingly amoral description of situational reversal” whose intent was not to exhort moralistically about the danger of riches but to portray metaphorically “the reversal of expectation and situation, of value and judgment which is the concomitant of . . . the Kingdom’s disruptive advent” and to make that advent “linguistically present” (Crossan 1973, 68). Bernard Scott (1989, 146–59) also takes vv. 19–26 to be the core parable “about boundaries and connections,” whose central images are the chasm and the gate. The point is neither that there will be a final reversal of earthly fortune and misfortune nor that God will help the poor but rather that the rich of the world always have opportunity to pass through the gate (“Grace is the gate”) to the neighbor in need or, to put it differently, that the rich man can become a patron to Lazarus (Scott 1989, 151). Only when the system of patronage fails, owing to the blindness of the rich man, does God intervene, and when God intervenes, the gate becomes a chasm. The opportunity for solidarity with Lazarus has been lost.

Scott’s reading has the virtue of looking for social scripts in the parable, but his interpretation has not explored them as fully as it could. It is necessary, then, to examine the parable in light of its social scripts if its message is to be heard.

From Luke to Jesus

Once again, judgments about the parable as a parable of Jesus reflect how interpreters construe its meaning. Oesterley (1936, 208–9) believes that 16:26 was a later addition to the parable because it conflicts with his careful reconstructions of first-century views of the afterlife and, in particular, because the chasm has no precedent in rabbinic materials. Scott (1989) and Crossan (1973) conclude the parable with v. 26. Crossan is convinced that the discussion of the resurrection in vv. 27–31 traces to the early church, and Scott follows suit. Their decision to close the parable at v. 26 means that they discard two consensus readings of the parable. From Bultmann to the present, the parable has been seen as a polemic against the substitution of “signs” as a complement to the Torah and the Prophets, and since Jeremias, the five brothers have been seen as another clue to the parable’s meaning.

The reading of the parable proposed in this chapter takes the entire narrative, vv. 19–31, to be a parable of Jesus. This study suspects that the parable ended with the phrase “neither will they be convinced if someone should *return/come to them* from the dead” rather than the reference to the resurrection, “rise from the dead.” Yet even this change may not be necessary because *anistēmi*, when used intransitively, can mean simply “to come back to life” (BAGD 70). But here the reference would mean to return to the earth in the form of a spiritual visitation from a departed soul (cf. Oesterley 1936, 210). The reasons for retaining the entire parable become clear as its meaning is explored in the following section.

Social Scripts and Story Line

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus assumes the social structure of an advanced agrarian society like the ones outlined in chapter 4. Much like the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (chapter 5), this parable brings together figures from the extremes of that social structure. Except in the parable, their realities hardly ever touched.

The Rich Man and the Beggar

The rich man belongs to the urban elite, the class that controls wealth, power, and privilege. Jesus’ brief description makes the man’s position clear. He is clothed in purple, the most costly dye, whose use was severely limited even among elites. He wears “the garments of luxury” (Smith 1937, 135), which “insinuate that he lived like a king” (Fitzmyer 1985, 1130). His Egyptian linen is “the most luxurious fabric of the ancient world” (Manson 1949, 295; Jeremias 1963, 183). Both items are mentioned in Rev. 18:12 as cargoes shipped by merchants around the Mediterranean. In short, the rich man dresses with imported luxury items to display his great wealth as a form of conspicuous consumption.

The rich man eats as he dresses, with extravagant excess, not just on special occasions but “every day.” Oesterley (1936, 204), who assumed that the rich man was a Pharisee, wondered how he could eat so excessively and not violate the Sabbath. The problem is more apparent than real, because class-based readings of the Torah were usually able to remove such apparent inconsistencies from view. More to the point, because the requirements for Torah obedience apply to the circumstances surrounding

the preparation of food, the condition of the dishes in which the food is prepared and served, and the purity of the parties sharing table companionship but do not apply to the amount of food consumed, it is hard to imagine why the rich man could not continue his lifestyle and remain obedient to the Torah. Even this problem is solved if the rich man was, as T. W. Manson assumed, a Sadducee not bound by Pharisaic concerns but living out his conviction that his wealth represented God's overflowing blessing in his life. God parceled out wealth and poverty; it is not the rich man's task to question the dispositions of the Almighty. Because this abundance cannot be enjoyed beyond death, he wants to enjoy it to the fullest while he can (Manson 1949, 295–98). The basic problem with the concerns of Smith and Manson is that their preoccupations distract from the social and economic contrast that animates the story and displace those social concerns with religious questions. The central contrast of the parable focuses on the great class disparity between the rich man and Lazarus (Rohrbaugh 1978, 69–85).

As if to reinforce this contention, the final element describing the rich man also alludes to his social prominence: it is the mention of his "gate," which I. Howard Marshall (1978, 635) takes to be "a large ornamental gateway to a city or a mansion." (According to Oesterley [1936, 205], the gate indicates "a nobly built mansion.") With these deft strokes, Jesus has sketched the life of the urban elite whose "houses" (*oikoi*) control the political and economic life of the preindustrial city and its surrounding countryside.

By contrast with the rich man, Lazarus is a destitute beggar, clothed with ulcerated sores, lying at the great gate. The verb here (the passive of *ballō*) is "often used to describe an afflicted person, bedridden or crippled" (Fitzmyer 1985, 1131). It connotes one who has been "thrown down" or "cast down" by fate or other unspecified forces. One of the purposes of the parable is to disclose some of those forces. Lazarus is perpetually hungry, and in light of his skin condition, he is probably shunned as unclean. This made begging even more difficult and may account for his passivity. On this matter, Scott (1989, 151) has noted that Lazarus has lost "even the honor of a beggar" because he no longer "provides an occasion for almsgiving."

Lazarus has been thrown down at the rich man's gate, hoping to receive "what fell from the rich man's table." Most commentators assume this

refers to crumbs or table scraps, but as early as the first decade of this century, Claude Montefiore (1909, 2:1003) recognized that it also refers to the loaves of bread used as napkins by the rich man and his guests. “Napkins were not used for the hands. The guests wiped their hands on [bits of] bread, and then threw the pieces under the table” (Oesterley 1936, 205). Rabbinic traditions cite reasons of purity and hygiene for adhering to the practice; they also command the gleaning of the leftovers for sharing with the poor (Jeremias 1963, 184). Whether guests broke one piece of bread from each pita-like loaf before using the remainder as a napkin or helped themselves to a stack of bread loaves designated as napkins makes little difference. In the rich man’s house, the purpose of the practice was the same. It was another form of conspicuous consumption that turned the necessities of life into disposables.

Lazarus lay at the gate, hoping to receive some of those choice loaves when the servants threw the garbage into the streets; and the street curs, knowing a good thing when they saw it, waited near him, the unclean with the unclean. These dogs have elicited a great range of comment. J. D. M. Derrett (1970b, 89f.) understands the dogs to be the guard dogs of the rich man’s house. They have been allowed in the banquet hall after the guests have departed to clean up the table droppings. By contrast, Lazarus has not, for the verb (“longed to satisfy his hunger”) indicates an unfulfilled wish. He received neither used bread-napkins nor scraps. Even the dogs were taken care of first.

More commonly, the dogs are taken to be street dogs, whose licking graphically depicts how vulnerable Lazarus has become. He cannot even defend himself from their actions, which render him more degraded and unclean. This touch may have led the parable’s hearers to conclude that Lazarus was a sinner being punished by God. One recalls the words of the Lord to Ahab, spoken through Elijah: “ ‘Thus says the Lord: In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood’ ” (1 Kings 21:19). The similarity of Lazarus’s fate to the fate of Ahab may have led hearers to assume that both were being punished for their sin. The prophecy also suggests how close to death Lazarus is.

Where did beggars like Lazarus come from? In advanced agrarian societies, how did people like Lazarus come to such desperate straits? Most people like Lazarus began their life where the vast majority of the population was born, in the country, either on a peasant farm or in a village.

A beggar such as Lazarus may have had the misfortune of being born second or third among the sons of the family, and because the family had only enough land for the eldest to inherit, he had to leave the family plot and seek work elsewhere when he began to consume more than he could produce within the economy of the peasant household. It is equally possible that he was a peasant farmer who had lost his patrimony through the oppressive foreclosure of mortgage by urban elites, who would then have added his small plot of land to their expanding estates. At first, he may have worked as a day laborer in the countryside, tending vines or bringing in the harvest. But the work was seasonal. Perhaps he tried to catch on with an artisan, but artisans too taught their trades to their eldest sons. There were just too many children. Unable to support himself by working as a day laborer in the country, Lazarus probably migrated to the city, looking for work, where he became an urban day laborer. But time was running out. The city, no less than the country, was overrun with the excess sons of the poor and with forcibly displaced peasant farmers. Although this situation suited the purposes of the rich because it depressed wages, it robbed day laborers of any bargaining power. As his body deteriorated from malnutrition, Lazarus could no longer compete for jobs. He was vulnerable to disease. Cuts wouldn’t heal; soon they abscessed, and in time, he turned to begging. In time, begging became more difficult, and even Lazarus knew that the end was near.

Behind the figure of Lazarus in the parable was a cluster of familiar social scripts. Seen in this context, the Lazarus who is thrown down at the rich man’s gate is far beyond the reach of patronage (contra Scott 1989, 151). During his descent from former landowner or excess child of peasant household to begging, he might have sought patronage from a retainer of someone like the rich man, but he had failed. Patron-client relationships could cushion one’s fall for a time, but by the time he became a destitute beggar, Lazarus was beyond redemption through patronage. In this regard, an oddity needs to be mentioned. It is unlikely that Lazarus would have been allowed to camp out in the wealthy district of the city. He would most likely have been cleared out when the gates separating the elite quarter from other, poorer areas were closed. Once again, the purpose of the codification is to bring together figures who were normally kept apart. At this point, the parable does not rely on social realism but serves another purpose.

There is, however, an anomaly in this all too familiar paradigm. The beggar's name, Lazarus, means "helped by God" or "God has helped." The name may simply serve to undermine the assumption that he is a sinner being punished by God. If so, it prepares the hearer for his unexpectedly good fate in the afterlife. Derrett has proposed another solution, namely, that Lazarus is "none other than 'Eliezer, Abraham's steward," mentioned in Gen. 15:2, who, according to midrashic tradition, was sent by Abraham "to the land to observe how the 'tenants' [were] dealing with [their] property" and their obligation to show hospitality (Derrett 1970b, 86f.). Because Eliezer became a well-known figure in Jewish Haggadah, the suggestion, though difficult to assess, is not impossible.

The onrush of events in the parable sweeps aside whatever pause the name might give or conjectures the hearer might entertain in light of the meaning of Lazarus's name. The rich man dies and is buried, that is, accorded a proper funeral. This is important to note because it indicates that his entire life was marked by signs of God's blessing and favor. "To the very end," Smith (1937, 136) notes, "no misfortune happened to the rich man such as could be interpreted as an act of Divine judgment; his life of ease and luxury was followed by honourable burial." By contrast, Lazarus was apparently left unburied. As Joseph Fitzmyer (1985, 1132) puts it, "Unburied by human beings, he was carried off by heavenly beings." But 16:22 leaves two matters unresolved: the fate of Lazarus's body and the fate of the rich man's soul. We know that Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, and we know that the rich man was buried. That is all.

The first portion of the parable, vv. 19–22, has concluded. It has depicted the enormous chasm that separated the urban elite from the expendable poor. In doing this, it has also created resonances that remain undeveloped: the gate, for example. The gate clearly functions in the opening scene as a boundary marker; it shuts out Lazarus and symbolizes the social barrier between the elites and the expendables. But who can forget the purpose of the gate as a place of judgment, the elders sitting at the gate to adjudicate Torah, or Samuel meeting Saul at the gate to appoint him as a prince over the people because Yahweh declared, "I have seen the suffering of my people, because their outcry has come to me" (1 Sam. 9:16)? Who could forget Amos's indictment of Israel and charge to her?

For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins—

you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate. . . .
Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate.

(Amos 5:12, 15a)

Yet nowhere in the opening scene of the parable has the relationship of the gate as the place of justice been explored. Of course, the gate to which Amos referred is the gate of the city, a public space, not the gate to a mansion of an elite; but the echoes remain.

Abraham's bosom, introduced in v. 22, has also generated a great deal of comment. Does it represent a late development of the idea of being gathered to the fathers? Is it an image of a child lying on a parent's lap? Is it the place of rest for the martyrs (Manson 1949, 299; Marshall 1978, 636; Haupt 1921)? Is it an image of an honored guest reclining on the bosom of the host of a banquet (cf. John 13:23)? Or is it the destination that confirms Lazarus's identity as Eliezer journeying home to Abraham's estate in the care of his angelic servants? Whatever its particular ambience, the basic meaning of Abraham's bosom is clear: it is a place of honor where Lazarus will receive the care he did not have in life. The image of Lazarus as honored guest at the banquet of the patriarchs would seem most appropriate to the context. The great banquet of Abraham would then contrast with the sumptuous feasts of the first scene of the parable (Segundo 1985, 112f.).

Hades, the Chasm, and the Pedagogy of the Oppressor

The second portion of the parable, vv. 23–31, begins on a surprising, perhaps even shocking, note: "In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom" (16:23; NRSV except for final phrase). The destiny of the rich man's soul is disclosed. But the second part of the parable turns on the assumption that Hades does *not* equal hell. In the first century, thinking about life beyond death was in a state of great flux and uncertainty. It would clearly be anachronistic to imbue the parable with the cosmology of later Christian thought, as many interpreters have done (for example, Marshall 1978, 637–38). Hades is, as Manson and many others have observed, equivalent to Sheol in that it is "the shadowy abode of the dead, to which all [people] without distinction must come" (Manson 1949, 300; cf. Oesterley 1936,

205–7). *First Enoch* 22 speaks of a place in Sheol reserved "for sinners when they die and are buried in the earth and judgement has not been executed upon them in their lifetime. Here their spirits shall be set apart in . . . great pain till the great day of judgement and punishment and pardon" (quoted in Smith 1937, 136; see also Grensted 1914/15; Kreitzer 1992; Standen 1921/22). Hades is, therefore, like a waiting place where righteous and sinners alike are gathered after death but separated from each other.

Even so, the parable is not yet located on the other side of the great divide when judgment is irrevocable and where separation is eternal. This explains the kinship language that obtains throughout. The rich man calls Abraham "father," and Abraham continues to call him "child" (*teknon*). It may be useful to conceive of the landscape as reflecting another social construction of reality, where the invisible chasm that separated the rich man and Lazarus has become visible and where the extremes of another social order are depicted, top (Abraham's bosom) and bottom (Hades). Now the situations of the two figures are reversed.

Other parallels mark the second scene of the drama. As Lazarus received not even a crumb from the rich man's table, so the rich man will receive not even a drop of water from Lazarus's fingertip. The gate of scene one has become a chasm or wadi (Bishop 1973, 3–5) whose purpose is the same: to keep social distance between the two figures. In life, the gate protected the rich man from street people like Lazarus; the chasm now protects Lazarus from the predatory rich man.

The second scene begins with a confident and deeply ironic request from the rich man: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames" (16:24). The request seems humble enough, as Jeremias (1963, 185) inferred, and appeals to the rich man's kinship ties with Abraham. Scott (1989, 153f.) concludes that the rich man petitioned Abraham "because he is the model of hospitality," a characterization based on the incident at the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1–15). A rabbinic midrash considered the virtue of Abraham to be greater than Job's, because Abraham provided shelters along the highways where he left "food and drink" for travelers who "ate and drank and blessed heaven" (Scott 1989, 153f.). The rabbis were persuaded that Abraham's hospitality was to be a model for every child of Abraham. In light of these traditions, it is possible

that the rich man appeals to his descent from Abraham and asks for hospitality.

The rich man's "request" is delivered with two imperatives: show mercy and send Lazarus. He is still an elite, accustomed to issuing orders and having them obeyed. He never asks why he is in the flames, although he does know why Lazarus is with Abraham. To the rich man, Lazarus is self-evidently a servant, a domestic, an errand boy to do Abraham's bidding, so his own demand follows. The rich man's recognition of Lazarus exposes his hardness of heart. Lazarus was not just a nameless, anonymous beggar at his gate; the rich man knew his name. Whatever his sins may be, the rich man was not blind. He saw and knew Lazarus. But he has not yet perceived that Abraham is both his father and Lazarus's father. Of course, if Abraham is their common ancestor, then they are brothers, kin.

So Abraham begins his pedagogy of the oppressor: "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony" (v. 25). The appeal to "remember" ties the present scene to the first scene and suggests some relation between them. Smith (1937, 138) believes that Abraham is expressing a popular theodicy "which explained the prosperity of the wicked as due to the fact that God refrains from punishing them in this life in order that they may receive their punishment in full in the after-life." If this is so, Abraham is reminding the rich man of his life so that he will recognize, from his current state of distress, that he died with some sin or wickedness on his soul. He is still a "child of Abraham" but a child in need of repentance, so that "the merits of Abraham may yet be able to stand him in good stead" (Oesterley 1936, 208). According to rabbinic belief, even "the wicked in Hell are capable of repentance," and when they do repent and atone for their previously unacknowledged sin, then Abraham "descends into Hell" and leads them "into Paradise" (Oesterley 1936, 208).

When viewed in this context, the chasm prevents premature closure of the pedagogy by preventing Lazarus from instinctively obeying the command of the rich man to carry water to him to relieve his thirst. Once again, the second scene of the parable echoes the first. Just as Lazarus "desired to be fed" (but was not) from the rich man's table, so here Lazarus "would pass" (but cannot) from Abraham to the rich man. Keep the heat on; perhaps it will lead to recognition, and recognition to repentance. Although

the use of the reverential passive “has been fixed” implies that the chasm is the work and wisdom of God, it is not eternal but functional.

In response to this initial exchange, the rich man refuses to draw inferences from his situation and changes his strategy. If commanding does not work, try pleading. Pheme Perkins (1981, 71f., 135f.) thinks that, in his persistence, the rich man borders on the comic. Rather than wailing, weeping, and gnashing his teeth like a proper sinner, he tries to weasel his way out by bargaining with Abraham while the flames keep licking his feet. Whether comedic or tragic, the rich man “remains totally blind and unrepentant” (Marshall 1978, 637). The depth of his sin becomes even clearer with his next ploy. Again his comments are darkly ironic: “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment” (v. 27).

Contrary to Oesterley’s (1936, 210f.) reading of it, this petition represents neither “the beginning of a better frame of mind” nor a shift from “selfish enjoyment” to concern for others. The plea bargain underscores the rich man’s blindness. He uses kinship terms (father, brothers), but they are confined to members of his house and, by extension, to members of his class. For the rich man, class solidarity and kinship loyalty define the world and his arena of concern. Jeremias, who proposed that the parable should be titled “the parable of the six brothers,” recognized that the parable’s center of gravity could be located here. Indeed, Jeremias (1963, 186) believed that the parable was directed at hearers who resembled the five brothers, who “live in selfish luxury, deaf to God’s word, in the belief that death ends all.” If he is right, then the rich man’s request is no more than an expedient designed to shield his class from the consequences of their luxury. John Donahue (1988, 171) is convinced that the rich man’s words reveal too late his realization that “in neglecting Lazarus, he was neglecting the Torah.” But the man’s concern is confined to his father and brothers; he wants them warned lest they share his fate. His failure to recognize Lazarus as a brother at least implies that he does not intend the desired warning to change their attitudes or behavior toward the poor.

Patiently, Abraham rejects the plea bargain as firmly as he has refused to be bullied: “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them” (v. 29). The Torah and the Prophets are the centerpieces of the rich man’s religion. He was Torah-obedient and, whether a Pharisee or a Sadducee,

lived accordingly. But whose Torah? The Torah of the prophets or the Torah of the priests and scribes? The Torah that proclaimed, “There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today” (Deut. 15:4–5), or the Torah that declared that the people must not make themselves unclean by any of the forbidden practices, “You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy” (Lev. 20:26)? The Torah of the debt code with its sabbatical and jubilee provisions or the Torah of the purity code with its classifications into clean and unclean (see Belo 1981, 37–59)? The Torah that protected the poor or the Torah that blamed and condemned the poor? In Abraham’s rejoinder, one can hear the words of Micah: “[Yahweh] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

From the rich man’s perspective, Abraham has clearly missed the point: “No, father Abraham.” The rich man is no longer pleading; he is arguing his case: “But if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent” (Luke 16:30). He is bargaining for special treatment, special privilege for his family (Glen 1962, 69f.). The common warning available to all people is not good enough. Elite people require privileged, insider information. By implication, the rich man is blaming God for his predicament and Abraham for not doing more to redeem him. He is proposing an improvement on the divine provision of the Torah. As Smith (1937, 141) saw clearly, to grant the rich man’s request would be to concede “that the Scriptures were not in themselves a sufficient witness to the will of God but needed to be supplemented if the wicked were to be moved to repentance.” This is the rich man’s view of things. If Scripture has not worked in his case and in the case of his class, then surely it is not good enough. Another messenger is needed (Glen 1962, 71).

The rich man’s last request simply specifies how he would use Lazarus to execute his proposal. He would send him in a vision or dream with a message. As the parable sits in the context being proposed here, the request is neither that Lazarus be returned from the grave nor that he be resurrected from the dead, only that his spirit convey a message from the world of the dead to the living. The irony has come full circle. For some time, the rich man has been bargaining with just such ghostly figures and they do not

seem to be making much headway. His refusal to accept their pedagogy foreshadows how his earthly counterparts would react. Cadoux (1931, 128) perceived the point when he observed, “Conscience is not convinced nor the spiritual world vindicated by signs. . . . With the unseen world naked before him, the rich man’s sympathies are as limited as ever.” It remains only for Abraham to conclude, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (16:31). In the context being proposed here, the final reference is to the return of Lazarus’s ghostly apparition, not to the resurrection of Jesus as many interpreters have held.

A number of commentators have found the point of the parable in Abraham’s final words: it is a parable against seeking signs. As Bultmann (1963, 196) remarked, God did not need to confirm the revelation of the divine will in the Torah and the prophets by recourse to miracles. The parable follows the consistent practice of Jesus in refusing to give a sign to an evil and adulterous generation (Matt. 12:38–42; 16:1–4). But the sign theme is subordinate to a more important point, the adequacy of the Torah and the Prophets. In addition, the theme of Moses and the prophets bears directly on the figures in the parable, the rich man and Lazarus, and their fates.

Hades may not be eternal or the judgment that brought the rich man there irrevocable, but his refusal to repent is rapidly making it so. The parable ends with Abraham appealing to Moses and the prophets in his final effort to persuade the rich man to listen and to convince him to look, to give him eyes to see and ears to hear. But just as the rich man fails to see Lazarus as a brother and kin, he fails to hear Abraham. The pedagogy of the oppressor has failed. C. H. Cave (1969, 319–25) provides indirect but interesting support for this reading by means of his argument that the parable was told in conjunction with the Torah reading from Genesis 15, coupled with Isa. 1:5; its import was to teach “the severity of the judgment that threatens Israel if she continues in her unrepentant state.” Although Cave reads this judgment in terms of a Gentile–Jewish dynamic, it could equally well be read in terms of class conflict within Israel.

The Parable’s Center of Gravity

The time has come to put the two pieces together. Too many interpreters, noting the double themes of the parable, have concluded that the meaning lies in the second part, a decision that minimizes the significance of Lazarus. Justifying his characterization of the parable as the story of the six brothers, Jeremias (1963, 186) writes:

> That means that Jesus does not want to comment on a social problem, nor does he intend to give teaching about the after-life, but he relates the parable to warn [those] who resemble the brothers of the rich man of the impending danger. . . . Hence the poor Lazarus is only a secondary figure, introduced by way of contrast.

Similarly, Eduard Schweizer (1984, 262) judges that "the problem of God's distributive justice is not addressed. . . . It is [the surviving brothers] whom the word of God must liberate from their perverse and stupid self-assurance." But Jeremias reduces Lazarus to an appendage even though his changing fate is central to the parable, and Schweizer reduces the parable to an abstract issue, "perverse and stupid self-assurance" being corrected by the Word of God, which sounds suspiciously like a neo-orthodox critique of nineteenth-century liberal theology.

Following Jeremias's analysis that identifies the second part of the parable as Jesus' epilogue attached to a popular legend about the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife, others find the point of the parable in its polemic against signs. Jesus is defending the sufficiency of the Scriptures as revealing the will of God. Bultmann, Cadoux, Oesterley, Smith, and Jeremias all propose this solution. "[The one] who will not submit to the Word of God, will not be converted by a miracle. . . . The demand for a sign is an evasion and a sign of impenitence" (Jeremias 1963, 187). This approach to the parable dissects the story by removing the first part. Then, having accomplished this surgical procedure, the interpreters translate the meaning of the parable into an abstract issue, specific to none of the figures who inhabit its narrative world.

A final peculiarity needs to be noted. All interpreters share a great concern that the role of wealth not be misunderstood. John Stanley Glen (1962, 72) seems most concerned about this possible misreading of the parable:

> It would be wrong to equate riches with sin and poverty with piety, as suggested by the simple, uninterpreted fact that the rich man went to hell and the beggar to heaven. The impression that the former ended in perdition for no other reason than the fact that he was rich, and that the latter ended in glory for no other reason than the fact that he was poor, is a sociological interpretation the Bible does not sanction.

It is not the rich man's wealth but his callous lovelessness and impious self-indulgence that are condemned; similarly, it is Lazarus's humble piety that is commended, not his poverty. Thus the ungodly rich are punished, and the pious poor rewarded. These interpreters seem to agree that the theme of the parable is the dangers of wealth, for as Donahue (1988, 171) notes, "One of the prime dangers of wealth is that it causes 'blindness,' . . . [the rich man] never saw Lazarus at his gate," a conclusion with which Perkins (1981, 72) concurs: "[Jesus' audience] knew that wealth could blind a person to the obligations of justice and concern for the poor." The problem with this conclusion, by itself, is that it fails to account for the fact that the rich man did see Lazarus and knew his name. Lazarus was not one of the invisible poor, overlooked by the rich man.

However, the last two approaches do provide some useful clues. The parable is not a story about abstract social types but a story about representatives of two social classes, the urban elites and the desperate expendables, those who had nearly everything and those who had almost nothing. In this case, wealth may indeed lead to Hades, for such wealth could be obtained only by the systemic exploitation of the poor, and it could be maintained only by their continual oppression. The urban elites who lived at the expense of the poor twisted Torah and Temple to serve their ends. They read the Prophets for their comfort and Moses to study the purities lest they should become unclean. Their wealth and its use in conspicuous consumption, their rapacious greed and its extraction of any surplus from the poor, their pursuit of power and privilege with its accompanying suppression of the people of the land, all these characteristics of the rich man's class reveal that its wealth is no sign of blessing but a curse on the land. The rich man is not overtly condemned for his wealth, and the parable probably assumes that he is pious and Torah-observant because those were characteristics of the ruling elites in Jerusalem and other urban areas. But his fate after death and his subsequent

refusal to perceive Lazarus as kin describe the nearly insurmountable barriers erected by his class and its privilege. Conversely, aside from his name, Lazarus is nowhere portrayed as patient, pious, or trusting Yahweh. As Juan Luis Segundo (1985, 114) saw, Abraham tells the rich man that Lazarus is participating in the eschatological banquet "simply and solely because he is one of the poor." If Martin Luther was convinced that we are justified by faith, Jesus told a parable in which Lazarus was justified by his abject, grinding poverty.

This parable, insofar as it is a proclamation of the reign of God, is not proclaimed to everyone as good news. It is good news to Lazarus but bad news to the rich man. This is God's preferential option for the poor (Segundo 1985, 90–94). The analysis of social classes through their representative figures constitutes Jesus' pastoral parable on the Palestinian economy.

What about Moses and the prophets and the refusal to send back Lazarus as a sign? The request was superfluous, for there were Lazaruses at every gate and on every corner, and each one was a sign disclosing the same systemic oppression and destruction of life. Did Jesus not say, "You always have the poor with you," (Mark 14:7; Matt. 26:11)? The parable clarifies the meaning of the persistent presence of the poor on the streets and at the gate. The rich man's brothers had no need of a nocturnal visitation from Lazarus's ghost; they needed, rather, to read Moses in order to decipher the prophetic word written by the broken bodies on the streets and the crushed spirits at the gate. Lazarus, then, is essential to the parable, not a secondary character, and the unity of the parable lies in the way the description of social classes in the first part sets up the exhortation to read Moses and the Prophets in the second part.

Codifying Legitimation

Systems of oppression require forms of mystification and legitimation. One powerful source of legitimation resides in how an ultimate ordering of things is used to justify current human arrangements. In the political sphere of first-century Palestine, this entailed the use of some form of the mandate of heaven, and in the social sphere, the use of the afterlife to justify the inequities of human life. Portraying the age to come as a confirmation of the present age provided potent support for a two-tiered society, the blessed

wealthy in control and the cursed poor suffering from the consequences of their sin. It is just this use of the future to legitimate the present that ties together the parable's two scenes.

Having been surrounded with signs of God's abundant blessing, his own evident prosperity, and even his honorable death, the rich man should have been in Abraham's bosom. By contrast, Lazarus should have been in the flames. This portrayal would have confirmed the social system that honored one and discarded the other as shameful. The reversal of their expected fates undermined not simply the hearers' view of the afterlife but, more important, their assumption that present circumstances could be used as a reliable guide for discerning God's judgments or, to put the matter more pointedly, that social class was an indicator of divine blessing or honorable status. Once this connection had been broken, the assorted rural poor of Galilee or Judaea who heard the parable could inquire into reasons for their misery that were much closer to home.

In first-century Palestine, any such presumed aligning of human fate with divine will involved the sanction of sacred texts, in the case of the parable, the Torah (= Moses) and the Prophets. But Jesus was not making an abstract or generalized appeal to Scripture; he was making an appeal in the context of what had been revealed in the parable about the rich and the destitute. How could the holy and the clean end up in the flames while the unclean poor were taken into the care of Abraham's bosom when the Torah, as interpreted by Jerusalem scribes, concluded that the opposite should occur? If wealth and poverty were not signs of God's blessing and curse, then how were they to be understood? If wealth and poverty were not the result of God's mandate, then what were their causes? If the scribes were wrong about this matter, could they be trusted to interpret the Torah in other matters? The parable discloses a loose thread capable of unraveling a much larger pattern.

In this context, the figure of Abraham is most important. Abram was depicted as a rich man (Gen. 13:2); his refusal to accept the king of Sodom's offer to keep the plunder he had taken in battle traces to his desire to have his wealth known as a sign of God's favor rather than as human generosity (Gen. 14:13–24). He purchased a burial cave for Sarah for the hefty price of four hundred shekels of silver (Gen. 23:13–16), and Abraham himself, like the rich man, was buried with honor (Gen. 25:7–11). The traditions of hospitality associated with Abraham (see above) also imply his

great wealth, and in Luke 13:22–30, Abraham and his offspring are depicted hosting the great banquet of the reign of God along with the other prophets. All of this implies that the rich man, not Lazarus, would most likely be identified as a child of Abraham. Yet in the parable, an "eschatological" Abraham receives Lazarus but not the rich man. It is this Abraham who appeals somewhat ironically to the Torah and the Prophets, both of which have been as misused by the ruling elites as has his honorable name. The very voices that cried out against injustice had been coopted to justify oppression, and the very figure who embodied the principle of extension in the debt code had been displaced and forced to sojourn as the legitimizer of the purity codes (Belo 1981, 37–59). His hospitality had been reinterpreted into a form of condescending almsgiving whose purpose only reinforced the distinction between clean (the wealthy) and unclean (the poor). The use of Abraham in the parable reinforces its purpose as codification. By selecting a figure whose value for legitimating the social order was great, Jesus increased the shock value of the representation while enlisting Abraham as advocate of the desperately poor.

In the reading of the parable proposed here, its two component parts are intimately related. The weakness of the parable as interpreted by Bultmann and those who followed his lead lay in its seemingly unrelated parts. Every exegete had to treat each part separately (Bultmann), subordinate one to the other (Jeremias), or choose which one to interpret (Crossan and Scott). But this reading offers a rationale for retaining both parts of the parable, because they are both essential to the codification. This does not ensure the accuracy of the proposed reading, but it does offer an alternative to the approaches that have dominated discussion of this parable.

8

What If the Messiah Came and Nothing Changed?

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:23–35)

The parable of the unmerciful servant, found only in Matthew, is located at the close of Matthew's discourse on community discipline (Matt. 18:1–35), which concludes with the familiar formula (19:1) that marks the end of each of Matthew's five discourses (cf. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 26:1). It fits well into the discourse fashioned by Matthew and has subsequently been read in that context. By contrast, this study reads the parable as codifying the apparatus bureaucracy of the royal court and as examining the role of retainers in that bureaucracy's operation. Beyond this purpose, the parable also analyzes the futility of one popular form of the messianic hope.

The Matthean Reading of the Parable

Three aspects of the parable have come under intensive scrutiny when critics have attempted to identify Matthean additions to the parable. They are: (1) the connective "therefore/for this reason" (*dia touto*); (2) the introductory formula, "the reign heaven is like;" and (3) the closing moral or summation in v. 35. All three of these elements are discussed in more detail below. Before moving to a full discussion of them, it should be noted

that some scholars have also questioned whether v. 34 belongs to the pre-Matthean parable. W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 99–100) believed it to be a later addition "reflecting apocalyptic interests," and Norman Perrin (1967, 125) thought that both vv. 34 and 35 were required to "convert the original challenge of the parable into a warning." Although Joachim Jeremias and others wondered whether Jesus would have introduced a reference to torturers when torture was illegal under Jewish law, they generally resolved the anomaly by arguing that the parable used a Gentile environment to portray the horrors of the last judgment. Of course, as A. H. McNeile (1915, 270) and many others have observed, this problem is not nearly as difficult as it appears because torture was used regularly during Maccabean and Herodian times whether or not it was sanctioned by law, so the appeal to Jewish law cannot be determinative. The ruler and his court generally operated beyond the realm of law. Whatever else may be said, the discussion about the status of v. 34 has generated no clear consensus. It is time to turn to the other three elements, about which a greater consensus exists.

At first glance, the parable appears to illustrate the pronouncement story in vv. 21–22, as its introductory "therefore" (*dia touto*) suggests; but the parable neither illustrates nor develops the theme of forgiving "seventy times seven." Rather, it implies only that one must always stand ready to forgive (Manson 1949, 213). Observing the same tension but stating it in a more ironic way, John Dominic Crossan (1973, 105–6) calls attention to the fact that the very God who, through Jesus (vv. 21–22), exhorts us to forgive one another seventy-times-seven times immediately thereafter (vv. 23–35) abandons this lofty standard and nails the servant after his first failure! But despite considerable difficulties in relating the parable to its context, very few commentators have found the matter as daunting as Crossan has. For instance, John Donahue (1988, 73) accepts the disjunction between the parable and its preceding verses but still believes that they complement each other: the answer to Peter's question (vv. 21, 22) speaks about the quantitative nature of forgiveness, which can be expressed over and over again, whereas the parable (vv. 23–35) addresses the qualitative precondition of forgiveness. In similar fashion, Ernst Fuchs (1959, 494) claims that the parable teaches that God's "love and indulgence" are no longer rooted in "moral conduct, but with God's own claim offered us in Jesus." As one might suspect, every effort to lessen the distance between

the parable and its setting only acknowledges the problem in a different form and calls attention once again to the tension between text and narrative context. All this implies that the parable was placed in its current location either by Matthew or in the pre-Matthean tradition (Manson 1949, 213; Jeremias 1963, 97; Linnemann 1966, 106; Crossan 1973, 105). This being the case, the connective "therefore" most likely came from Matthew's hand.

Not only did Matthew place the parable in its current context, but he also seems to have refocused its meaning by supplying the introductory formula, "the kingdom of heaven [is like]," and the closing moral in v. 35. Rudolf Bultmann (1963, 177) was certain that v. 35 established the parable's right meaning even if it could not be used to "establish its original character," and in many and various ways, his judgment has been echoed by subsequent interpreters. Even when an interpreter such as B. T. D. Smith (1937, 217, 219) confessed that the details of the parable were difficult to decipher and that its total picture appeared murky, he was confident of its meaning precisely because the moral attached in v. 35 was as clear as the details were unclear. One might glimpse the machinations of court intrigue "through a glass darkly" but could read its meaning "face to face." Therefore, interpreters generally agree that Matthew supplied the introductory formula. With unusual candor, C. H. Dodd (1935, 33) admitted that he had "failed to find any specific link between this parable . . . and the idea of the Kingdom of God apart from the general notion of judgment," but others found less difficulty in making the connection. The parable proclaimed the "limitless nature of divine forgiveness" (Oesterley 1936, 95) and the necessity for forgiveness and mercy to govern among those who enter into God's reign, lest those who have experienced God's mercy fall under judgment and forfeit their lives (Manson 1949, 213; Jeremias 1963, 213; Linnemann 1966, 111–13; Donahue 1988, 76–77), or to restate the point using existential language, lose their authentic existence (Via 1967, 142–43; Dietzfelbinger 1972, 437–51).

The Matthean reading of the parable seems fairly clear. The parable concludes the discourse on community discipline, which W. G. Thompson (1970) characterized as "Matthew's advice to a divided community." Like the discourse, the parable weaves together three related themes: the character of the kingdom of God; mutual forgiveness as the behavior required by the presence of the kingdom; and, in the absence of such mercy, the inevitability of judgment. The conclusion to the parable (v. 35) could

very well serve as the thematic summary of the entire discourse in Matthew 18. To receive forgiveness both enables and obligates one to offer forgiveness, not as an occasional exception to the rule but as a habit of life (vv. 21–22) and not without an awareness of the forgiveness one has received but as a response to it (vv. 23–35).

From Matthew to Jesus

With regard to this parable, interpreters have been confident that they could discern the meaning of the parable of Jesus that stands behind the Matthean reading, although their confidence has produced a variety of meanings of its own and remains more indebted to Matthew's theology and ethics than they seem to acknowledge.

If one removes the Matthean connective ("for this reason"), the formulaic introduction in v. 23a ("the kingdom of heaven may be compared to"), and the Matthean conclusion in v. 35, then where does the parable's pre-Matthean center of gravity lie? Two basic answers have been proposed. One finds the meaning of the parable in the action of the king, and therefore, the climax of the parable is seen to occur in the king's verdict in v. 33. Eta Linnemann (1966, 95–113) argues this position in detail because she needs the royal edict of v. 33 to ground her assertion that justice expressed through mercy represents an ordinance rather than an occasional exception to the rule. If this assertion expresses the meaning of the parable, the only character whose voice can disclose the "original ordering of reality" is the God/king figure. A second answer finds the key to the parable in the shifting fates of the first servant. Jeremias (1963, 97, 213) includes this parable under the theme of "realized discipleship," although it teaches its theme by negative example. Its dark ending links forgiveness to the last judgment. No mortal can stand on rights before God; one will be forgiven as one has forgiven. Human mercy calls forth divine mercy "on that day." This is the secret that links human love with divine love. Thus the parable told by Jesus proclaims love expressed through mercy as the way of God's reign while it simultaneously warns its hearers about the coming judgment for those who ignore this proclamation and fail to act in light of it. Following a similar line of interpretation, Perrin (1967, 125–26) thinks that the parable, minus its introductory formula (v. 23a) and closing verses (vv. 34–35), stands pretty much as Jesus told it. Its point was clear: "As you

have been forgiven, so must you forgive." It is an "example story" of the reign of God, which challenged its hearers to forgive because the new reality of God's reign had arrived in Jesus.

These two answers do not so much describe separate trajectories as they define the two foci of an ellipse. Once one identifies the king with God, the rest follows. It is only a matter of emphasis. If one wants to emphasize the forgiveness of God, one attends to the first focus; if one wishes to emphasize human response and responsiblity, one attends to the second. In either case, the discourse produced by each reading will fall within the area defined by the ellipse.

As with other parables, interpreters have imported a great variety of categories to assess the meaning of this parable, ranging from the existential (Via 1967) and the eclectic literary (Scott 1989) to the structural (Crossan 1973). But as we have seen with regard to other parables, the differences are often more apparent than real because all of the interpreters accept a broadly theological and moral province for the parable, whether that framework is expressed through traditional categories (Jeremias's "realized discipleship" and last judgment) or less traditional existential categories (Via's ontological possibilities of gaining or losing one's existence, that is, living authentically or inauthentically). Interpreters at both ends of the spectrum, and most in between, accept the king as a God figure and the servant as a stand-in for ambiguous humanity, a kind of "everyone" in Matthean guise. Once interpreters identify the king with God, or the "Giver of Authentic Existence," then the servant must be seen in a negative light. More to the point, to bridge the gap between the "then" of Matthew's community or Jesus' presumed audience and the "now" of the reader, interpreters import a notion of universal human nature that enables them to relate the servant to their contemporary readers. So certain are they of this reality that Smith (1937, 217–19), for instance, can freely admit that the social picture in the parable is murky to the point of unintelligibility while maintaining that the parable's meaning is crystal clear. This could be the case only if the social scenario were either incidental or irrelevant to the meaning of the parable, whose center of gravity would then lie in some form of hypothetical universal human nature. Given this point of view, it would matter little whether one begins with God's unchanging nature or with humanity's essential nature. The parable's figures would be ciphers for the clash of abstract ideas (mercy, forgiveness, goodness, justice as

ordinance, and their opposites), illustrated conveniently by the king and his servant.

This study's reading of the parable also takes the connective "therefore," the introductory "reign of heaven" formula (v. 23a), and the concluding moral (v. 35) as Matthean. The rest of the parable is taken as a parable of Jesus, with some serious reservations about the figure of "ten thousand talents." Although the suspicion here is that the figure has been inflated by Matthew, it could also serve as one of the exaggerations that contributes to the purpose of the codification as a type of political cartoon. A figure of one hundred talents would serve the purpose of indicating the first servant's exalted and trusted status and would parallel the figure appearing in the second debt. The issue is discussed below in more detail.

Codifying the World of Retainers

As Smith (1937, 217–19) realized to his chagrin, the parable is set in the court of a ruler; most likely this ruler was a client king of the Roman world with whom Jesus' hearers were familiar, although one cannot be certain because the parable may be evoking popular ideas of court life just as easily as it may be describing court life. Bernard Scott (1989, 270–71) critiqued J. D. M. Derrett (1970c) on a similar point by noting that Derrett confused a storyteller's repertoire with an actual description of court life. The primary conflict in the parable is between the ruler and an important retainer in his court, although for the sake of contrast the parable also introduces a conflict between the highly placed bureaucrat and other middle-level retainers (the other servants) in the same court bureaucracy. The province of the parable's social scene is clear enough to warrant some investigation into the structure of court life and the role of retainers. Although it is true that one can supply at best only a general picture, it is not true that the picture in the parable is lost or indistinct beyond recovery or that it serves only as part of a narrative repertoire unrelated to social reality, because the very storytelling possibilities alluded to in the use of the word "repertoire" are grounded in the range of scenarios offered by the storyteller's social, cultural, and political milieu. Because the parable's setting is related to its encoded message, it may prove useful to reconstruct that setting as one means of sleuthing for clues to its meaning.

The Ruler in an Agrarian Society

Both the king and the so-called unmerciful servant are products of a social and political system.[1] A brief sketch of that system as it both stands behind the parable and emerges in it may help to contextualize the principal figures found in the parable.

As noted earlier in this study (chapter 4), the king was an elite belonging to the top 1 to 2 percent of the population. He had engaged in an intense power struggle with other equally ambitious aristocrats for the most lucrative prize of all, control of the state or political apparatus. After he had secured that prize, he engaged in perpetual conflict to consolidate his power and protect himself from the endless intrigues and designs of competing aristocrats, who would gladly usurp his power as he had usurped his predecessor. To do this effectively required immense resources, which were amassed internally through confiscation of land and various forms of tribute or what today would be called direct and indirect taxation. Being a typical agrarian ruler, the king of the parable operated with what Gerhard Lenski (1966, 214) calls "a proprietary theory of the state." Once he had achieved the kingship, the resources of the state were his possession to plunder for his gain. The ruler stood at the apex of an authoritarian system, above the law and beyond most restraints.

The Servants as Retainer Bureaucrats

No ruler could exercise power alone. Each required an apparatus to put policies into practice. Consequently, a retainer class arose to provide bureaucratic services for elites in general and the ruler in particular. Retainer bureaucrats can be divided into three levels, which Thomas Carney (1975, 52), moving from the lowest grade to the highest, identifies as "the *illitterati* (porters, gaolers, etc.), the *litterati* (scribes, lawyers, accountants) and possessors of *dignitates* (high official positions)." The highest-level retainers were operatives in the royal court, often the heads of the largest bureaucratic agencies; the middle-level bureaucrats were the record keepers. Often stationed in the same department and post for many years, the latter group schemed to gain the lowest titles held by the highest bureaucrats, to maintain and if possible increase their emoluments, and to protect their honor and the honor of their department. Because the entire

system was fueled by endemic feuding, mistrust, and “honest graft” (Lenski 1966, 246), the ruler frequently changed department heads to keep corruption and ambition within reasonable bounds. To counter this snooping, the middle-level bureaucrats kept elaborate records and proliferated red tape. This course of action both rendered their work more opaque to department heads, who were drawn from the highest level of the apparatus, and created more opportunities for influence peddling, featherbedding, and bribes. No bottom-level retainers figure prominently in the parable, although one group from that grade is mentioned, the “torturers” at the end of the parable, and another is implied by the phrase “was brought to him” in v. 24. The reference here may be either to low-level functionaries who escort the retainer to the king or to royal bodyguards who perform the function of intimidation. Clearly, the parable’s attention is focused on the high- and middle-level retainers.

The high retainers were the survivors of the endless court intrigues by which they sought their advancement and the advancement of their clients[2] at the expense of their competitors. It was a cutthroat world constructed around competing pyramids of patron-client loyalties. As Carney (1975, 60) aptly says, “This was a power-ridden, fear-dominated society.” The skills required for success were not akin to the rationalized criteria for advancement that would later govern the development of bureaucratic structures but were highly personal and idiosyncratic; nor was court life buttressed by an ideology of adherence to abstract principles of justice and service. Service meant service to the ruler, the ultimate patron, in exchange for benefits and access to power and privilege. The closer to the ruler one could rise, the more power and wealth one could amass as rewards.

The unmerciful servant of the parable is just such a highly placed bureaucrat in the hierarchy of the court. Of course, an immense distance separates even highly placed court bureaucrats from the ruler, so he is called a “servant” (*doulos*).[3] The purpose of such a “title” was to emphasize his complete dependence on the goodwill or patronage of the ruler. Just as the wealth of the realm belonged, in principle, to the ruler, so all subjects of the realm were his servants. No doubt the servant carries other titles appropriate to his position in the apparatus bureaucracy, but when he comes before his master, he is only a *doulos*; the powerful court patron becomes the abject client of the ruler, whose displeasure can shatter his career. To emphasize their control and the dependence of their bureaucrats on them, “rulers

would stress the point that these officials were either their personal servants or the servants of the polity" (Eisenstadt 1963, 15; cf. *Ant*. 16.155–56).

The functions of the bureaucracy were divided into several basic areas: the military; the administrative; the financial; and the ideological, which includes what here is called the religious. The major function of the financial branch of the bureaucracy was collecting tribute and other forms of taxes, both direct and indirect. As Lenski (1966, 246) notes, the retainers "performed most of the work involved in effecting a transfer of the economic surplus from the producers to the political elite." It is that so-called surplus that forms the focus of the parable.

The Royal Court in the Parable

It is time to move from a general sketch of the political system of advanced agrarian societies or aristocratic empires to the specifics of the parable. In spite of the criticism to which Scott (1989) has subjected him, Derrett (1970c, 32) has labored to make sense of the parable in the setting of a royal court and to resist "the temptation to read theologically significant factors" into the parable, at least as a hasty alternative to struggling with the details and troubling aspects of the story. Although the reading of the parable presented here differs from that of Derrett, he has proven a fruitful conversational partner.

The King and His Actions

Whether the king depicted here is Jewish or Gentile is a moot point. The history of Hasmonaean and Herodian rulers in Palestine suggests that it would be difficult to differentiate them from their Hellenistic or Roman counterparts. All of them ruled aristocratic empires, and all of them used similar means to pursue common ends (Kautsky 1982). Nowhere was this truer than in the case of extracting tribute, which appears to be the backdrop for the opening scene of the parable. It is certainly possible that Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman rulers were all homogenized in the mind of the common people into some vague notion of powerful tyrants who extracted their tribute and taxes, whatever hardships they created for the village. If the parable caught the attention of its audience, it might have been precisely because it purported to reveal a glimpse of the inside machinations of court life rather than presenting the usual way the royal court impacted villagers,

namely, by means of the toll or tax collector. It transported its hearers out of their daily struggle for subsistence into the nearly magical and unimaginable world of the powerful elites whose whims dominated their lives. Gunther Bornkamm (1960, 86) has captured the extravagant tone of the parable, which depicts "Oriental tyrannies: a great king and his satrap, boundless mercy and boundless anger, unlimited by any law. For everything in this parable is beyond measure and limit." Standing in basic agreement with him, Perrin (1967, 126) suspects that the parable presents "the kind of hearsay knowledge of absolute monarchies of the East and the practices of their courts" that Palestinian peasants and other common people might possess. The use of the fantastic total of ten thousand talents suggests this kind of exaggeration. More is said of this later in this chapter.

If the parable is meant to evoke the virtually unlimited power and incalculable wealth of the ruler, then the actions of the king are consistent with his role. The king's decision to sell the servant, his family, and his possessions merely expresses the ruler's right to punish fraudulent bureaucrats and make an example of them; the king is not here concerned primarily with recouping lost revenues but with punishing the failure or foolhardiness of the servant. The harsher his judgment on the servant, the less likely that others will try to swindle him in the future. Likewise, his subsequent decision to forgive the debt no less than his final withdrawal of mercy expresses his absolute power and total command. The king is above the law and not subjected to the law; indeed, his word is the law, and he can change it virtually at will.

Only when the king becomes a surrogate for God does the behavior of the king in the parable become a problem. Having observed that "only the creation of a God-king perspective prevents a revolt against a God who demands multiple forgiveness but lashes out at the first failure," Scott (1989, 269) agonizes over the implications of the parable at just this point. He argues that the king's reversal of his forgiveness "threatens to destroy the ordered world" because "the king moves outside the law and all are at risk" (1989, 277–78). In light of what is known about kingship in agrarian societies, these comments are questionable. The king always moved outside the law and stood above it. Because arbitrariness was one of the tools of authoritarian control, everyone was always at risk, whether in the village or in the king's court. In his desire to cast God as a kingly figure, Scott has apparently reverted to the modern paradigm of the constitutional monarch,

who stands beneath the majesty of the law, rather than followed the logic of the absolute and ruthless tyrant, who gives and takes away at will.

Derrett (1970c, 43) seeks to avoid the problem by arguing that the king's release is conditional on the servant's lightening "the burdens of the provinces" and generally oiling "all the wheels for the good of the kingdom." When the servant refuses to follow this course and throttles his fellow bureaucrat, he forfeits his right to the king's forgiveness. This reading preserves the morality of the king as surrogate for God by heaping blame on the servant.

However, Scott and Derrett, along with many others, have noted the significance of the forgiveness of debt with which the parable opens, and to this issue the present study returns after examining the unmerciful servant and his colleagues more closely.

The Servant and His Calculations regarding the King and the Other Servants of the Bureaucracy

The unmerciful servant of the parable is a type, a top-echelon bureaucrat responsible for extracting tribute from the subjects of the realm. He reached those heights because he was cunning, shrewd, ruthless, merciless, calculating, loyal, and political. He has proven himself adept at building a following of clients while courting more powerful patrons, first serving them as client and then, as his power grew, forming coalitions with them. He is single-mindedly focused on his job and dedicated to the system that has rewarded him so handsomely. He has mastered the arts of back-stabbing and witch-hunting to bring down opponents vying for the very positions he covets for himself in the zero-sum game of apparatus politics; he has learned how to recruit and promote his clients, rewarding his friends and punishing his enemies. By becoming a creature of the apparatus bureaucracy, he has climbed to its highest level. If it serves no other purpose, the figure of ten thousand talents signals his location at the highest levels of the bureaucracy and his attendant power, prestige, and wealth.

Bureaucracies were born out of the need of usurping aristocrats to remove important ruling functions from the hands of competing aristocrats, who could use them to build a base of power that could eventually challenge their own rule. Therefore, rulers developed a retainer class to staff

the bureaucracy necessary to implement their political goals, to extract the resources required to maintain and extend their political control, and to legitimate their rule. By drawing on nonelites to fill these roles, the ruler simultaneously eliminated aristocrats from fulfilling vital political functions, thereby reducing the aristocrats' power, and created competition among the children of nonelites for these lucrative positions. The very process of building bureaucracies, however, created differentiated social structures and free-floating resources that were not already committed to or embedded in traditional groups. In short, because the ruler had to invest the bureaucracies with enough power to do their jobs, the bureaucrats who inhabited the fledgling structures were able to convert that power to develop the autonomy of the bureaucracies while extending their own spheres of influence and internal control and aggressively seeking benefits and emoluments. Whenever possible, these bureaucrats would then institutionalize their gains. At best, a ruler could exert limited control over the process since it represented an alternative preferable to complete reliance on the shifting allegiances, scheming, and envious animosity of the aristocratic elite (Eisenstadt 1963, 3–30). Bureaucracies thus became bases of power that remained under the control of the ruler but in tension with him.

Thus the reckoning scene in this parable between king and top-level bureaucrat depicts a chapter in the ongoing battle to exert control over the bureaucracy while keeping it subservient to the ruler's interests. Nowhere was this issue more sensitive or more critical to a ruler than in reckoning the tribute for which the bureaucracy was responsible, because the ruler needed a steady flow of resources to implement his political goals and maintain his power. As a part of this ruler's strategy of exerting control, he designates the contract for collecting tribute as a "loan" (*daneion*) that he can call in at will. The scene in this parable is not, as Derrett argues, of a tax farmer who has failed to honor his contract. To put the scene in this context necessitates long explanations for why the prospective tax farmer was not required either to buy the contract in advance or to produce sureties (Derrett 1970c, 36–37). The scene is more likely a conflict between a ruler and a powerful, trusted bureaucrat, and between them, neither contract nor sureties were needed. The bureaucrat had proven his ability and loyalty over many projects.

This setting explains both the initial reaction of the ruler and his subsequent moderation. The failure to produce the tribute constitutes a challenge to the ruler; only a fool would believe that the servant can produce nothing. Perhaps the servant has grown too confident in his power by overstepping the thin line between calculated risk and recklessness. The king recognizes the challenge and reacts immediately, thereby reasserting his control over the reckoning and over the life of the servant who has forgotten that the king can, at a moment's notice, crush him and reduce him to slavery. The king cannot betray the slightest sign of weakness. In a world where the king is the law, everything depends on his disposition, and the servant has seriously miscalculated both how the king might respond to his challenge and the weaknesses of his own position. Behind the unmerciful servant are others fiercely competing to take his place. His downfall would be their opportunity. The king may be dependent on the bureaucracy, but he is not dependent on any single bureaucrat.

Realizing his mistake, the servant reverts to form and does obeisance; he falls on his knees at the king's feet and implores him like the supplicant he now is. At this moment, the servant's life hangs in the balance. The threat to sell him, his family, and his possessions is not an empty one. Nor would he be sold to another aristocrat looking for a household bureaucrat. He would most likely be sold into the harshest forms of slavery, to work in the mines or on a galley ship. His power and position have evaporated in the heat of royal anger, "Sell him, his family, and his possessions."

So far the scenario is understandable, but why would the king reverse himself and show mercy? The order to sell the minister, his family, and his goods, which may include the confiscation of any property he owns, was a threat uttered to put the bureaucrat in his place. When it received the appropriate response, it was no longer needed. In fact, the servant does not simply repent but promises to make good on the contract for the tribute. His plea indicates that he can very well cover a good deal of his debt. This is exactly what the king expected when he threatened him with slavery. But why not hold him to his promise and collect the tribute? Why forgive the debt when he has virtually admitted his fraud? Derrett (1970c, 38–39) finds the reasons in the servant's many assets. He possesses the "specialized skill" needed to extract tribute from the provinces, and he doubtless has a vast network of clients working in his service as spies, informers, and agents so that he can control communication over large areas. He is literate

and therefore nearly indispensable, because accurate record keeping was a skill in short supply. Besides, if the king were to dispatch the servant into slavery, there would be another ambitious bureaucrat to take his place, and the next one might be less subject to control or aligned with a plotting faction of the aristocracy. This servant has proven his loyalty and worth until this maneuver, and he responded with proper desperation when judged. He will be less likely to try so brazen a move again. He has been a good client and may be so again. Perhaps what is needed is an unexpected act of patronly generosity. So the king reverses himself, even forgiving the debt.

The unmerciful servant has barely survived a crisis of his own making. His effort to increase his power and wealth nearly resulted in his ruin. Of course, word of his brush with disaster travels through the bureaucracy. What happened between the servant and the king would be spread through rumor and gossip, always with the goal of undermining the once feared and powerful bureaucrat. It is a dog-eat-dog world. Even though the servant has avoided disaster, he leaves the king's presence a vulnerable operative. He must find ways to reassert his control. That opportunity presents itself when he meets one of his clients, a middle-level bureaucrat whom he has supported with an unsecured loan. Perhaps the bureaucrat used the money to bid for a taxation subcontract. The master strategist reacts; just as he was called onto the carpet, he now assumes the posture of a patron and demands a settling of accounts with his client. He will demonstrate to the vultures searching for signs of weakness that he is as strong as ever, and if he has to sacrifice one client to make his case, it is a price worth paying.

A loan of one hundred denarii was not small. It represented one-half of a Roman legionnaire's annual salary and more than a full year's wages of a day laborer. Few peasants would see one hundred denarii in a lifetime. The size of the debt signifies the relative social location of the middle-level bureaucrat in relation to the top-echelon official. As the contrast between talent and denarius suggests, the two officials belong to different worlds. As the king is lord over the high-level bureaucrat, so the servant is lord over the middle-level bureaucrat.

If the hearers of the parable were rural Galileans or Judaeans, the parable would not have been a story about a great debt and a small one. Both debts were large, one much greater than the other but both involving sums of money that most rural villagers would never see. The fact that the

“servants” in the parable deal in money marks their world off from that of the villagers whose economy was mixed but still involved extensive barter and trading in kind.

So much attention has been paid to the size of the first debt, ten thousand talents, that some attention needs to be devoted to it here. Comparisons with tribute totals for entire provinces indicate that the debt is large by any standards. Usually cited are Josephus’s figures (*Ant*. 17.318–20), according to which Galilee and Peraea yielded an annual tribute of two hundred talents to Antipas; Batanaea, Trachonitis, and Auranitis, one hundred talents to Philip; and Idumaea, Judaea, and Samaria and some cities subjected to his rule, six hundred talents to Archelaus. Seeing it as a parallel for the figure of ten thousand talents in the parable, Derrett (1970c, 33) cites the case of Joseph, son of Tobias (*Ant*. 12.175–76), who promised Ptolemy that he would double the tribute of eight thousand talents collected from Coele-Syria, Phoenicia, Judaea, and Samaria. But Josephus is known for inflating numbers, as his translator, Marcus, noted (*Ant*., LCL, note c, 92–93), and the lack of other precedents argues for the inordinate nature of the debt-loan. Furthermore, Jeremias (1963, 210) notes that both the number ten thousand and the denomination of wealth, the talent, were the largest units in use. Some have therefore assumed either that Jesus used the amount to symbolize an unpayable debt to God or that Matthew inflated the figure. More recently, Martinus de Boer (1988) argued that Jeremias was right in thinking the figure inflated but wrong in attributing it to Jesus; it was Matthew who inflated the figure to make the theological point that Jeremias mistakenly attributed to Jesus. De Boer (1988, 227–28) thought that the pre-Matthean parable contrasted two debts of ten thousand denarii (not talents) and one hundred denarii.

Against de Boer, this study argues that the more probable contrast would have been between one hundred talents and one hundred denarii, but that decision reflects the reconstruction of the relative positions of top-level and middle-level bureaucrats. It is the distinction between talent and denarius that communicates the difference. In addition, a top-level bureaucrat in a financial bureau could well have been responsible for collecting one hundred talents in tribute. Of course, any refiguring of the first debt assumes that the parable relies on verisimilitude more than exaggeration or, as Scott (1989, 270–71) would say, confuses repertoire with reality, and this is at best a judgment call. It could well be that the enormous debt of ten

thousand talents is meant to signal to the hearer that this servant is the most trusted of all because he has been given the highest possible responsibility, that is, he is responsible for collecting the largest imaginable amount of money.

By any reckoning, the relative amounts of the debt-loans, both given without need for sureties in the contexts of patron-client relationships, clearly portray the power of the first servant over his colleague. It is this calculation that drives the humiliated and shamed servant to throttle his client and call in his debt. He still has the power to act with impunity; indeed, he must act ruthlessly to preserve his aura of invincibility. In its way, this action represents as serious a miscalculation as his first mistake.

Retainers represented a narrow portion of the population, about 5 to 7 percent at most. They existed precariously between the patronage of the aristocrats and the ruler who exploited them, on the one hand, and the bitter hostility of those whom they themselves exploited, on the other. To survive, they needed to support one another; they could not treat one another as they would the vast population outside the bureaucracy. As Carney (1975, 53) indicates, even the lowest of those in the bureaucracy had more power than those outside it, and anyone in the bureaucracy was better off than the peasants and rural artisans who comprised the vast majority of the population. When the unmerciful bureaucrat turns against one of his clients, he threatens them all by ruthlessly withdrawing his patronage and undermining a client.

What moves are available to the other threatened servants? They may have heard the rumors, and if not, they would soon hear them. Their patron was nearly destroyed, and if he were to fall, they would fall with him. Then he turns on one of their own, no doubt to reassert his control and display his power. Who knows? He may turn against others as well. But the servants can defect to another powerful patron and, through him, gain access to the king. They would be welcomed by their new patron, and by informing on their former patron, they could expect to be rewarded. This is the course of action they pursue. As both Fredrik Barth (1977) and Carl Lande (1977) note, patron-client networks were fragile and carried problems of reliability because they were not sanctioned legally but relied on personal loyalty. Clients could shift allegiances without warning. In this parable, the other servants have reason enough to shift their loyalty.

In short, the very course of action that the unmerciful servant chooses to consolidate his position possibly leads to the defection of some of his clients, who were most likely in sympathy with the retainer who is thrown in debtor's prison. This in turn leads to those clients gaining access to the king. It is also possible that, given the complex nature of the ruler's own network of informers and agents, the other servants already have direct access to the king, as the parable seems to suggest, and do not need to gain access through the offices of another patron. If so, then they already belong to the king's network of informers; they are moles planted within the varied patron-client networks that comprise court life and control bureaucratic life. In either case, the hearers, who were steeped in the world of clientelism, would have simply filled in what was implied by the parable's scenario. At this remove, it is just not possible to know which would have seemed more likely, and it is equally probable that neither of these would have seemed as likely as another alternative not even contemplated here.

The king's response to the news brought by the informers does require some explanation. Why would the king read the unmerciful servant so negatively? He was, after all, only using the very methods that had made him so effective at collecting tribute. Why would his exercise of those skills trouble the king? It is apparently not because the servant was disrupting the camaraderie of the retainers. Rulers constantly used retainers against each other in their efforts to control the bureaucracy's tendency toward autonomy. Hence Derrett's notion (1970c, 41) that the first servant breached "professional solidarity" is not a sufficient reason for the king's response, although it may be a contributing one. The hearer would have more likely expected the ruler to commend the unmerciful servant; "Well done good and faithful servant; you have not lost your edge."

The answer may need to be sought not in the economics of the situation but in a clash of values, specifically, of honor and shame. The extreme penalty at the end indicates that the servant has violated something sacred; it is out of all proportion to the collection of a one hundred-denarii debt. By his actions, the bureaucrat has shamed the king, violated his honor in some fundamental way. Therefore, he is abandoned to the torturers. The nature of that violation is examined in the final section.

What If the Messiah Came and Nothing Changed?

The parable begins with an extraordinary act, quite uncharacteristic of any agrarian ruler. The king of this parable forgives a debt of unimaginable proportions. It is a messianic act of forgiveness of debt. In their study of "popular movements at the time of Jesus," Richard Horsley and John Hanson (1985, 88–134) trace the outlines of a tradition of "royal pretenders and popular messianic movements" that they believe is rooted in the little tradition of the common people. In this tradition, the legitimacy of kingship begins with the acclamation of the people for charismatic leaders of humble origins whose courage and heroic feats encourage the people "to overthrow Herodian and Roman domination and to restore the traditional ideals of a free and egalitarian society" (Horsley and Hanson 1985, 116). From the time of Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.E.) through the first Jewish revolt (66–73 C.E.), these movements appear to have been triggered by the heavy burdens of tribute laid on the people by Herod and his family, the Jerusalem Temple and Roman overlord alike. The goal of such movements was "the restoration of social economic justice" (1985, 122), which for the vast majority of peasants and rural poor, mired in endless and inescapable debt, meant the forgiveness or cancellation of debt. Who else but a popular messianic figure could forgive such debt?

In his study of the parable, Derrett (1970c, 42) has an inkling of the meaning of the king's anger. He argues that the servant's mistake was missing the king's intent in forgiving his debt. It was more than a personal beneficence: "The release was for the good of the kingdom." It was but the first in a series of actions whose purpose was to "lighten the burdens of the provinces" and "oil all the wheels" for the well-being of the entire kingdom. It is the failure of the servant to take his cue from the king's action that leads to disaster. The great act of debt forgiveness was meant to initiate further acts of forgiveness of debt. The king has made it a point of honor, and he expects the servant to understand. He has broken the cycle of ruthless exploitation and extraction, and what the patron has done, the client must do.

The opening scene of the parable depicts a messianic moment, not in spiritualized terms but in an earthy economic image of a king canceling debt. The enormity of the figure of ten thousand talents may signify its messianic import. If the largest amount of debt imaginable has been canceled, then the messianic king has arrived and the messianic age has begun. It is the fulfillment of sabbatical and jubilee hopes condensed into a

moment. But the moment is short-lived. No sooner has the new age of debt forgiveness been inaugurated than it is canceled by the cutthroat tactics of a typical powerful bureaucrat. In light of the servant's subsequent action, the king looks like a fool or, worse yet, like a weak and gullible ruler without power over the behavior of his subjects. Backed into a corner, the king reverts with a vengeance to business as usual, delivering the courtier to the torturers. The parable ends on a darker note than that on which it began. Being sold into slavery looks merciful compared to the final disposition of the servant's case.

Whether expressed in the traditions of popular kingship or in other forms of messianic hope, the reliance on a future king to rescue the people from debt and bondage harbored a fatal, unnoticed contradiction. Kingship was an institution embedded in a bureaucratic system; indeed, it could not stand on its own but required the bureaucracy for its survival. Both kingship and bureaucracy operated within a common set of values; the endless feuding among aristocrats for greater wealth, power, and prestige was reflected in the lesser feuds among bureaucrats for an increasing share of the benefits extracted from the population base. The values of the ruling class provided the ideology that governed the retainer class, and the behavior of the apparatus bureaucrats reflected the behavior of the aristocracy. These values and their associated behavior were so engrained that they were taken for granted, providing an unquestioned framework within which to develop career strategies. The victims of elites and bureaucrats alike were the peasants, artisans, and rural poor who formed the great majority of the population. To be exiled from the bureaucracy and returned to the world of the exploited masses was the only threat required to keep retainers in line.

The momentum of this political system had been illustrated from the time of David to the present telling of the parable. The court history of David (2 Sam. 1 to 1 Kings 2) recounts the pressures that increasingly conformed David's rule to the pattern of other aristocratic empires. During the century of its rise and fall, the Hasmonaean dynasty traced a similar path from popular acclamation to oppression, leading eventually to a client king who, indebted as he was to the Romans, exploited the people of the land so ruthlessly that when he died his subjects traveled to Rome, imploring Caesar that they be placed under a Roman governor rather than continue under the house of Herod (*Ant*. 17.299–320). Of course, the subjects who

comprised the delegation were Jerusalem elites who controlled the Temple and would use its power no less ruthlessly than Herod had wielded his own.

In spite of historical precedents, the tradition of popular kingship persisted and assumed messianic forms. The parable, as read here, exposes the hidden contradiction in that fatal hope. Even if a king of messianic stature forgave debt of unimaginable proportions, he could not transfer that mercy to the bureaucratic system that encased his rule. The functionaries had internalized the system to such an extent that they were creatures of it. The systemic dynamics of the bureaucracy alone would force the cancellation of forgiveness and any other policy that threatened the existence of the bureaucracy itself. In fact, the very attempt to initiate such a merciful policy leads from bad to worse, from debt slavery to the torture chamber. Scott (1989, 280) saw as much when he noted that the parable ensnared the reader in an experience of "evil, not intentional evil, but implicit, unanticipated, systemic evil."

The parable points simultaneously to the hopelessness of looking for a messianic ruler and to the critical role played by retainers. Normally, the people among whom Jesus worked hated retainers because they were the visible figures who carried out the policies of the elite, and the people looked instead to the elites to change their circumstances. On rare occasions, for example, when Herod reduced taxes because of good fortune (*Ant*. 16.62–65) or committed vast personal resources to buy grain for the populace suffering from drought (*Ant*. 15.305–16), a ruler might affect the subjected populace in a beneficent manner rather than afflict them. But the exceptions only proved the rule. The maintenance of power required vast resources, and the accumulation of that wealth demanded the systematic and unrelenting exploitation of the population. Paradoxically, rulers were also captive to the system that created them; their power seemed unlimited, but they too were governed by a system that required vengeance when their efforts at generosity were frustrated by the bureaucrats who surrounded them.

The parable does highlight the crucial role played by retainers and holds it up for examination. Their role is also examined in the parable of the talents (see chapter 9). The parable that has been examined here focuses not only on the retainers' dependence on the ruler and, consequently, on their vulnerability but also on their power to frustrate the designs of a debt-forgiving ruler. Not even the most powerful retainer could secure his future

or ensure his life. Both remained hostage to the power of the ruler, who could reduce the highest bureaucrat to slavery or worse. Yet that very same retainer could undermine the king's policy of forgiveness and frustrate that policy's larger goals.

In short, the parable proposes that neither the messianic hope nor the tradition of popular kingship can resolve the people's dilemma. To reshape their world, the people of the land must look elsewhere. Just *where* is not the concern of this parable.

9

The Vulnerability of the Whistle-blower

The Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27)

The parable of the talents or *mnas*, found in Matt. 25:14–30 and Luke 19:11–27, is a curious parable. The differences in the parable as found in Matthew from that found in Luke are significant enough to raise questions about whether they are different versions of a common source or distinctive variations on a common theme. Do we have one parable redacted by two evangelists or two oral performances using similar themes? The matter is further complicated by Luke, who has apparently interwoven vestiges of a second parable (the throne claimant; cf. Luke 19:14, 15a, 27) to create a longer version of the parable of the talents. Not surprisingly, none of these variations has kept interpreters of the parable from settling on its theological meaning. This chapter reads the parable as codifying the world of retainers in the household of a powerful elite.

The Tradition History of the Parable

Scholars commonly identify three stages in the tradition history of the parable, usually working backward from the canonical texts to their reconstructed earlier forms. These three stages are identified as follows: (1) the parable as eschatological warning; (2) the parable as paranetic instruction; and (3) the parable of Jesus.

The Parable as Eschatological Warning: Matthew and Luke

In its current settings, the parable has been interpreted eschatologically. Matthew places the parable in the midst of his discourse on the judgment (chaps. 24–25). Its introductory formula, *hōster gap*, ties it to the parable of the wise and foolish maidens, which immediately precedes it (Matt. 25:1–13; see Oesterley 1936, 143). Matthew's eschatological reading of the parable can be detected in his alleged additions to the text: (1) v. 19a, "after a long time," a reference to the delay of the Parousia (McGaughy 1975, 237); (2) the language in which the master's blessing is couched, "enter into" and "joy of the master," which Lane McGaughy takes to refer to the messianic banquet (1975, 237; cf. Jeremias 1963, 60 n42); and (3) the addition of v. 30, which, B. T. D. Smith (1937, 23) argues, transposes the parable into an allegory. In keeping with Matthew's tendency to relate ethics to eschatology, his moralizing hand has been seen in v. 15b, "to each according to his ability" (Scott 1989, 226), and in the use of the maxim in v. 29 (Smith 1937, 55).

Similarly, Luke 19:11–27 has fashioned the parable as a response to those who presumed that the long-awaited Parousia was approaching. This is clearly stated in Luke's framing (v. 11) and in his structuring of the action. Each servant is given the same amount and the same charge (v. 13); what is true of one member of Luke's community is true of all without distinction. They exhibit their faith in the one who "reigns over them" by following his instructions. But others do not share their faith, and the introduction of the materials from the throne-claimant parable seems to turn the focus of the parable on those who question the Risen Lord's claim (Scott 1989, 222). The third servant evidently represents a type of this group, which may explain why Luke portrays the third servant so negatively. In Luke's parable, this servant hides his *mna* in a *soudarion* (cloth napkin) rather than in the ground, thereby indicating his irresponsibility, and Luke's master does not merely pronounce judgment but condemns the third servant "by your own words." Like the others for whom he is a stand-in, this servant is an enemy of the newly enthroned king because he objected to his reign. His action with regard to the *mna* is here interpreted eschatologically, and the judgment he receives reflects the attitudes he held and their subsequent effects on his "trading."

The Parable as Parenetic Instruction

The addition of a free-floating proverb (Matt. 25:29 and Luke 19:26; cf. Matt. 13:12; Mark 4:25 and Luke 8:18; Luke 19:26) and some moralizing redactional touches, such as the emphasis on ability in Matt. 25:15b and the developing contrast between two "good and trustworthy" servants and one "wicked and lazy" servant, have led numerous scholars to identify a second stage in the tradition history of the parable. In this stage, the church attempted to adapt a parable of Jesus told to a specific audience by generalizing its message (Dodd 1935, 148; Smith 1937, 58–59; Jeremias 1963, 62; et al.).

One interesting bit of collaborating evidence for this stage of reflection on the parable is found in the apocryphal Gospel of the Nazaraeans (Hennecke and Schneemelcher 1963, 1:149). In this version of the parable, the first servant wastes the master's wealth on harlots and flute players, the second hides the money entrusted to him, and the third makes a profit. At the reckoning with the master, the first servant is imprisoned, the second receives a rebuke, and the third is rewarded. McGaughy (1975, 239–45) suspects that the lighter sentence received by the inactive servant in the apocryphal version reflects Jewish puzzlement over the harshness of the penalty found in the original parable. In the Gospel of the Nazaraeans, the apparently unjust punishment is displaced onto the openly immoral and wasteful servant. But Richard Rohrbaugh (1993, 36–37) has correctly noted that Joachim Jeremias (1963, 58), whose reading has influenced McGaughy, reversed the order of the judgments on the last two servants so that the one who increased the master's wealth is accepted while the one who hid the talent is rebuked. The chiastic nature of the parable's structure indicates that the one who hid the talent is commended but the one who multiplied it is rebuked.

Although such a judgment may seem puzzling to modern ears, it makes sense in the context of peasant values in early Mediterranean societies, especially the notion of limited good and the preference for "use value" over "exchange value" (Rohrbaugh 1993, 33–36). This would certainly alter the parenetic meaning of the parable in a way that would differentiate it sharply from the canonical versions of the parable. If Rohrbaugh is right, the parable would resemble an exhortation to the village values of limited

good and an exchange economy while reinforcing the typical peasant's antagonism toward the growing exchange economy (the exchange economy is what this study has identified as an agrarian economy undergoing changes caused by commercialization).

To judge from modern commentary on the parable, this second stage of the tradition continues to exercise a profound influence on twentieth-century readings. Although the author of the Gospel of the Nazaraeans might have had difficulties understanding the harsh judgment pronounced on the inactive servant, his later counterparts have not (Mutch 1930/31). The third servant is almost universally vilified. C. H. Dodd (1935, 24) thinks the parable "a story of a man whom overcaution and cowardice led into a breach of trust." W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 149) finds a balanced message that is of great value for "practical religion," namely, that the use of grace increases godliness while "spurning it is to fall from grace." T. W. Manson (1949, 249) likewise sums it up with a maxim of his own: "The punishment for neglected opportunity is deprivation of opportunity." In a more contemporary idiom, Dan Via (1967, 119) finds that the refusal to risk leads to repressed guilt, which, when projected onto another, leads to "the loss of the opportunity for meaningful existence." In his search for the servant's "fatal flaw," John Donahue (1988, 106–8) is convinced that "out of fear of failure, he refused even to try to succeed." As even this brief survey reveals, the parable's moral center of gravity is located in the master's judgment of the third servant. Clearly, the parable has proven a fruitful text for generating moral commentary.

The Parable of Jesus

McGaughy (1975, 235–45) argued that Jesus constructed a parable around a postexilic maxim found in Matt. 25:24b–25 (parallel in Luke 19:20b–21). The maxim reflected postexilic Judaism's understanding of God as stern and harsh, as well as its belief in its mission to keep the Torah intact in a hostile world. Against this way of construing the mission of Judaism, Jesus told the parable of the talents, arguing that preserving the Torah by building a hedge around it was not enough. In this context, the parable was about neither eschatology nor ethics but contributed to an ongoing discussion about the mission of the house of Jacob in the world (cf. Isa. 49:6).

Anticipating this argument by nearly forty-five years, A. T. Cadoux (1931, 106) conjectured that the parable was spoken against "some class of men who, being charged with omitting to fulfill a divine trust, defended themselves by appealing to their conception of God." This thinly veiled "mug-shot" negative of the Pharisees was then developed more fully. Cadoux related the parable to the cleansing of the Temple and argued that it repeated Jesus' concern for Gentiles, sinners, and toll collectors. Its prophetic word was both a sharp rebuke to those who avoided the unclean in order to keep the Torah pure and a wry appeal to commercial practice as a precedent for religious toleration: just as you traffic with Gentiles in financial matters, charging interest to increase profit, why not traffic with Gentiles in religious matters, profiting from the good they offer while providing them with a good return from the riches of the Torah? Similarly, Dodd (1935, 151) was certain that the third servant reflected that "type of pious Jew" who, through "meticulous observance of the law," pursued "a policy of selfish exclusiveness" that rendered Israel as barren as the fig tree cursed by Jesus and defrauded God in the process. Willing to get even more specific, Jeremias (1963, 61–62) was convinced that Jesus' hearers would have identified the third servant with the scribes who were entrusted with the Torah but hoarded their treasure rather than investing it for the profit of the people of the land. Bernard Scott (1989, 234) expanded the nature of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees by framing it as an argument about "how one goes about claiming the future."

A Lingering Problem

Although a good deal of consensus exists concerning the tradition history of the parable, interpreters have been troubled at all stages with the portrayal of the "man going on a journey" (Matt. 25:14) or the "nobleman" (*eugenēs*; Luke 19:12). Because he has always been assumed to be a God figure, the third servant's character description of him has posed a problem. Oesterley (1936, 147–48) took the description to be nothing more than part of the "dramatic environment" of the parable, which could not be translated into moral terms. The more common approach is to discredit the third servant's words. They are slander begotten by "fear and insolence" (Smith 1937, 166), character assassination intended to distract attention from his own failure (Manson 1949, 247), repressed guilt projected onto the master

as a way of blaming him for his own failure (Via 1967, 119), or a fearful misreading of the "considerable magnanimity" of the one who entrusted to him an amount equal to fifteen years of wages (Donahue 1988, 108).

Scott (1989, 226–34) turns the anomaly into a hermeneutical clue for reading the parable. The hearer is forced to choose between the third servant's image of the master and the image that emerges from his actions in the parable. Stated otherwise, these competing images are "the explicit image put forward in aphorism by the third servant, and the image implied in the actions of the first two servants" (Scott 1989, 234). McGaughy (1975, 242–45) defines the environment more precisely by correlating the image of God in the parable with postexilic texts from Job, Psalms, and the *Aboth of Rabbi Nathan*. Having made these connections, McGaughy can argue that the portrayal of God in the parable is also found in other contemporary theological writings. This approach reduces the need to develop an apology for the image of God sketched by the third servant.

Nevertheless, in the course of developing his reading, Scott (1989, 230) did acknowledge that the third servant's characterization of the master appeals to a conventional type, the "absentee landlord who bleeds the land dry." Much earlier, Smith (1937, 166) conceded that the master of the parable, as one who "has no conscience where money is concerned," was more akin to "a man who expects to get blood out of a stone" than a God figure, but he did not pursue his insight. Jeremias (1963, 60–61) was clear about the context of the parable in Jesus' ministry as a weapon in the controversy against the scribes, but he also observed that "shorn of its ethical and allegorizing expansions," the parable depicts "an inconsiderate and rapacious" rich man bent on increasing his wealth during his absence by dividing it among his trusted household staff and charging them to invest it and return a yield. Perhaps the most interesting reading of all comes from the peasants in Solentiname, Nicaragua (Cardenal, ed., 1982, 4:38–48). Their instincts tell them that the master is an exploitive capitalist, but their priestly mentor, Ernesto Cardenal, keeps leading them away from their materialist reading to a spiritualized version of the parable.

The summary of attitudes about the figure of the master in the parable discloses an undertow of discontent among interpreters and provides a helpful starting place for reconstructing the social scene in the parable.

A Working Version of Jesus' Parable

Using Matthew's text as a base, the working version of the parable attributed to Jesus includes 25:14b–28. This means that the Matthean connective is removed from v. 14. Both vv. 29 and 30 appear to be additions, although it becomes evident that v. 30 can have a dark enough meaning of its own without eschatological overtones. But v. 29 is an independent logion and cannot be taken as part of the parable. The following sections of the chapter use the base version of the parable found in Matthew, which includes vv. 14b–28, with a passing reference to v. 30. Reference to the Lukan version is used to complement and enrich the Matthean version.

The Retainers of the Great Households

Much of the commentators' discussion cited above has attempted to interpret the parable without attending to its setting or scene. Because that scene is the household of an urban elite, it is helpful to sketch that scene in more detail before attempting to read the kind of codification expressed by the parable. Placing the characters in their social roles may provide information that can help to evaluate the different judgments expressed about the master and his servants.

The Place of the Household in the Ancient World

The ancient world was organized on three levels, the household, the city, and the imperium or kingdom. The most basic social, economic, political, and cultural unit was the household (*oikos*), not the peasant household of the village but the great household of the elite families. The members of the great households were the agents by whom the wealth of the land (the estates and villages that the aristocratic families controlled) was harvested, gathered into storage, redistributed or monetized, and exported. The *oikoi* of the elite were trading houses, export-import businesses, and the source of concentrated wealth. In addition to their economic importance, the great houses of the elites provided political leadership. The education received by

the sons of those houses inculcated the aristocratic values and ideologies needed to perpetuate the sons' rule through the internecine warfare among families called politics. At the same time, the female children were socialized into the skills needed to keep the domestic economy operating smoothly.

The household was a microcosm of the next level of organization, the city (*polis*). The importance of the *polis* during the Hellenistic era and from that period on has been discussed by Victor Tcherikover (1977, 1–36, 90–116) and many others. The city was more than an isolated island; it was the hub of an extensive economic and political network that controlled the lands radiating out from it. The public lives of elites were devoted to "politics," literally, the governing of the *polis*. The connection between *oikos* and *polis* was made clear by Aristotle, who viewed education in the household as training for participation in the life of the city (Aristotle, *Politics*, esp. Book 1). The *polis* was a microcosm of the imperium or kingdom. (For more on the ancient city, see Jeremias 1969; Jones 1940; Sjoberg 1960; Rohrbaugh 1991.)

The final level of organization was the imperium or kingdom. Just as a *polis* was a collection of significant households, so a kingdom was a collection of significant cities, along with the land controlled by them. An ancient kingdom was like a quilt, a patchwork of cities whose economic significance was related to the natural resources they controlled, whether plentiful annual crops, orchards, or vineyards, and perhaps mineral resources or the manufacture of some important items as well. The cities, in turn, were controlled by elite families whose households determined the economic, political, and cultural life of the cities.

Household Bureaucracies and Their Retainers

Because the entire system was fundamentally built upon the households of the elites, the aristocrats who headed these powerful families (the *paterfamilias* or the *oikodespotēs*) required the assistance of internal bureaucracies. The staff of household retainers included stewards, scribal accountants, tutors, and other related figures. The household bureaucracy, in imitation of the imperial bureaucracy, was organized hierarchically, the most competent and trusted retainers rising to the highest level. Indeed, the

greater the wealth of an aristocrat, the more elaborate his household bureaucracy needed to be. A large household staff was a sign of status and power (Kautsky 1982, 190–92).

The head of the household could not stay home if he intended to protect his interests and expand his influence. Not only would he travel to his estates but he would travel abroad in hopes of increasing his investments, initiating new business schemes, building patron-client networks, currying favor with imperial overlords, or perhaps representing his city in some official capacity. For the accumulation of his wealth, the basis of his power and prestige, to continue in his absence, he needed to entrust important portions of it to his household retainers. These powerful figures were not household slaves (*oiketeia*), although they may very well have been called *douloi* to emphasize their dependence on their patron-master. Their relationship to the *paterfamilias* was similar to the relationship between court bureaucrat and king. The household retainers were completely dependent on the goodwill of their patron, although they could certainly use their position to increase their own wealth. The trick was not to become too visible but to remain discreet while accumulating whatever wealth one could muster. Individual households could become the centers of great concentrations of wealth, requiring a fully developed bureaucratic hierarchy, although the household bureaucracy's scope would never approach the extent and internal articulation of the imperial or royal bureaucracy.

This briefly sketched background serves as a framework for interpreting the parable of the talents.

The Nobleman and His Retainers

The parable can be divided into three scenes: (1) the distribution of wealth, vv. 14–15; (2) the business venture, vv. 16–18; and (3) the reckoning, vv. 19–28 and perhaps some version of v. 30.

The Distribution of Wealth

Luke makes explicit what Matthew implies. The "man" (*anthrōpos*) embarking on a journey away from his household is a noble or aristocrat (*eugenēs*; Luke 19:12; cf. *Ant.* 10.186). The very fact that he is traveling,

whether “to a far country” to receive a client kingdom or abroad to pursue the interests of his household, marks him as a wealthy elite. Most people never ventured very far from their village, and a few would travel to the market town in their vicinity. Even accounting for the obligation to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, travel on any scale was rare. Only the wealthy could afford to journey abroad. Others remained in their villages and peasant households until forced from their land. Then they might become homeless beggars or wanderers, but even then they kept as near to familiar places as survival permitted.

The presence of a staff of retainers provides the second indicator of the man’s wealth and status. As was the case in the parable of the unmerciful servant, the retainers are here called *douloi*, which may indicate their literal status as slaves or may point to their dependent status as clients of a great patron. The following details suggest the latter, but no final answer is certain. The man’s staff is differentiated enough to be ranked in hierarchical fashion. The phrase *kata tēn idian dynamin* is usually rendered “to each according to his ability” on the assumption that it reveals Matthew’s moralizing hand. It could equally well be translated “to each according to his power,” where power indicates rank or status. In the matters of the household economy (*oikonomia*), a retainer would gain power according to his ability and capacity to manage the wealth for which he was responsible, so the more literal translation of *dynamis* (*TDNT* 2:284–317) is not as strange as it may seem at first glance. The advantage of translating it as “power” or “status” is that it discloses the relationship between ability and power or status, which may get lost when *dynamis* is read metaphorically to refer to moral capacity. Conversely, a retainer who turned out to be *adynatos*, that is, incapable or incompetent, would soon lose his place in the bureaucracy.

If this is the case, then the opening scene depicts a wealthy aristocrat assigning to three retainers proportions of his assets according to their status in his household hierarchy. The use of *idian* may indicate capability peculiar or particular to each retainer (BAGD, s.v. *dynamis*, 207–8), once again reinforcing the sense of relative position, although these subtle markers make sense only in light of the 5–2–1 distribution of talents. Even though the gradations of wealth entrusted to each reflect the retainers’ relative standing, the very lowest belongs to the most powerful group. One talent is no mean amount of money to place in another’s hands (Sellers

1962, B.2–4). Therefore, it is unlikely that the aristocrat is testing his staff, as so many of the moralizing readings of the parable imply; the retainers who appear in the opening scene are his most trusted inner circle. They have already passed numerous tests. In any case, it would be more likely that a powerful elite would test his staff when he was present to oversee the process and evaluate the results. Too much is riding on his continued accumulation of wealth to risk a talent for the purpose of testing a retainer. Testing retainers would have been done with lesser amounts.

However, it is possible that the distribution of talents does provide an opportunity for the retainers to consolidate or enhance their positions in the scheme of things. *Dynamis*, in contrast to *energeia*, can imply unrealized potency or potential, in which case the situation is one of the powerful becoming more powerful through successful execution of their orders rather than the unknown being tested for the first time. This understanding of the retainers' position may account in part for the attachment of the proverb in v. 29, which depicts just such a process. For the purposes of this reading, the distinction between the two words cannot be pursued any further. To do so would place too much weight on nuanced meaning of specific Greek words. The discussion is valuable to the extent that it contributes to elucidating the social scene being presented by the parable.

The Business Venture

It is significant that the portion of the master's "accumulated wealth" (*hyparchonta*; v. 14) to be distributed to the retainers is monetized. They have relatively liquid assets with which to work, a first-century form of venture capital. Of course, the economy of an agrarian society was much different from that of a modern capitalistic society, so the parallels are more apparent than real and likely to be more misleading than helpful. This much is clear: the three servants have convertible assets. The first servant "works with them" and turns a profit of five talents more; the second follows suit, doubling his original amount.

At this point, something needs to be said about the business relationship being depicted. As usual, J. D. M. Derrett (1966, 17–31) has gathered a plethora of details about the kinds of business ventures involving "capital-services partnership." Unfortunately, Derrett's entire article assumes either a merchant-king or a merchant-elite relationship and does not account for the

social scenario sketched in this chapter, but the details can be summarized briefly. Derrett (1966, 186n4) notes that the venture could proceed either with specific agreements about terms or with no prior agreement. In the latter case, one-half of the capital was considered “a deposit in trust” for which the investor was liable, while the other half was “a debt, a loan,” for which the merchant was liable. Profits could be divided in various ways, varying from half-and-half to one-third and two-thirds or one-quarter and three-quarters, the larger sum always going to the investor of capital because capital was considered more valuable than labor. High-risk ventures naturally offered the prospect of greater profits. Whether some or any of the terms Derrett identifies pertain to the patron-client relationship of retainers and elites is uncertain.

It is more likely that another model applies to the transaction depicted in this parable. No agreement is made between the master and his retainers beyond the distribution of talents. Some implicit understandings, however, must have governed the actions of the retainers, although such understandings, like so many “givens” that would be implicitly known to Jesus and his audience, remain unstated. The profit of 100 percent was “the minimum profit accepted under the laws of Hammurabi” (Derrett 1966, 190 and 190n2). Anything less was considered a default. Because two retainers double their entrusted wealth, that figure must illustrate either some acceptable profit margin or an excellent and higher than usual profit, as the master’s commendations suggest.

But what was in it for the retainer? In a word, the opportunity for “honest graft.” This much is implied by the time indicators. The first two servants go to work “at once” (*eutheōs*) and double their investment even though the master is gone for “a long time.” Their industry reflects the zeal with which they work the system to make a handsome return for the master, but it also reflects their desire to use some portion of that endowment to feather their own nests. First things first: the master’s initial investment must be secured, then doubled; after that, the retainers can make their profit. They are always walking a tightrope, keeping the master’s gain high enough to appease his greed and not incur his wrath while keeping their own accumulations of wealth small enough not to arouse suspicion yet lucrative enough to insure their future. The master knows the system too, and as long as the retainers keep watch of his interests and maintain a proper yield, he does not begrudge their gains. In fact, he stands to gain a great deal by encouraging

the process. Not only do the retainers do his dirty work, exploiting others for profit, but they siphon off anger that would otherwise be directed at him and his class.

Up to this point, the discussion has made some assumptions about how the money was used, and these assumptions need to be made more visible. Of all the contemporary commentators on the parable, the peasants of Solentiname were the ones to intuit the economic system that underlies the parable. After they heard the parable, Cardenal (1982, 4:39–41) characterized it as "a very ugly example . . . of exploitation, of speculation with money." One of the Solentiname peasants, Oscar, thought that the absentee master "looked for others who were exploiters like him" to double his wealth by exploiting "the people." This is essentially correct. The elites used their wealth to make loans to peasant farmers so that the farmers could plant the crops. Interest rates were high; estimates range to 60 percent and perhaps as high as 200 percent for loans on crops. The purpose of making such loans was not so much to make a large profit, at least by the standards of the ancient world, but to accept land as collateral so that the elites could foreclose on their loans in years when the crops could not cover the incurred indebtedness. Had the servants sought a more lucrative return, they might have contracted with a merchant for trade in luxury items or perhaps combined trade with the normal export and import of goods produced in the household. They might have entered into partnership with a small manufacturing operation specializing in luxury items, because the only "markets" in the ancient world were the urban elites; to make money meant pandering to their lust for luxury. By combining the talents they had received with the raw goods extracted from the peasants who were controlled by their household, the servants had the means necessary to increase wealth. But to do so, they had to exploit the peasant or village base of the household, the merchants with whom they entered into a common venture, or the peasants to whom they made loans.

In this respect, the first two retainers are as alike as peas in a pod. "In the same way" (*hōsautōs*; v. 17) communicates as much. They both use the same exploitive economy to increase the plunder that constitutes the master's wealth. Jesus' hearers would have had no difficulty identifying the type of figure represented by the servants in the parable; they had to contend with them daily, and they understood their role as exploiters. During the time of Jesus' public activity, Galilee and Judaea were under

economic stress because the people of the land who constituted the rural population were being subjected to two distinct systems of tribute, the Roman and the Temple. But the retainers in this parable are not state officials; they belong to an aristocratic household whose wealth also depends on the same population base that was being exploited by Rome and Jerusalem alike. These retainers must extract as much of the so-called surplus of the agricultural production as possible to secure their master's base of operation among the elites. Their extractions are on top of the systems of tribute demanded by colonial overlord and Jerusalem Temple, and their exploitive work sets the rules of the economic game played by an oppressive elite and an oppressed rural population.

The rules of this basic game had been changed by the early decades of the first century. Owing to the growing effects of commercialization on the agrarian economy, elites were more interested in the control of land, not just the control of the peasants who lived on the land and came with it. One result of this process (Kautsky 1982, 28–48; Paige 1975, 1–71) was the effort to displace peasants from their patrimonial plots of land and to reduce their status to that of landless, dependent laborers. In this way, elites could control the type of crops grown on land and could shift patterns of crops to maximize their yield or convert land usage to enterprises yielding harvests more easily monetized and exported, for example, the conversion of land to vineyards or orchards. By removing peasants from the land, the elites removed the obstacles presented by peasant reluctance to change their traditional ways, as well as the difficulties created by peasant suspicion of elites and the need to cope with endless peasant tactics for avoiding aristocratic demands on their products and their labor. The key figures in this process were the retainers of the elites who implemented these policies, and these are the types who appear in this parable.

Up to this point, the narrative could proceed quickly because everyone knew what retainers like this do with their master's money. With simple phrases such as "traded with them" or "made two more talents," the storyteller could pass over the retainers' familiar work because his hearers were the objects of this commercial activity. They could fill in the details with a hundred anecdotes that told of the effects of this system on their village and perhaps even their families. But by sharp contrast, the third figure is as puzzling as his action.

The Reckoning

The differences between the Lukan and Matthean versions of the parable culminate in the reckoning scene. By introducing the fragments of the throne-claimant parable, Luke transformed the reckoning into a court scene. The aristocrat departs a "nobleman" (*anthrōpos tis eugenēs*) but returns a king, "having received royal power." His royal return sets up a reckoning with two sets of servants, loyal subjects (*douloi*) and disgruntled citizens (*politai*). The third servant is revealed as a spokesman for the citizens who opposed the ruler, and in his speech (Luke 19:20–21) he articulates their discontent (v. 14) and shares their fate (v. 27).

By contrast, Matthew depicts a reckoning much more limited in scope. The "he" who went away (Matt. 25:15c) is an aristocratic head of a household, and he returns as "the master of those slaves" (v. 19) to settle accounts with them, not as a king judging his subjects (cf. Luke 19:15). Thus the reckoning is contained within the sphere of the *oikos* and its economy.

When the first two servants come before the master, they are rewarded as expected. They have both calculated correctly; the 100 percent profit is pleasing to the master. He responds accordingly by promising them bigger and better responsibilities in the future. At this point, if one compares Luke with Matthew, one notes a small but significant difference in the wording of the story. The Matthean servants declare, "I have made five [or two] more talents," but their Lukan counterparts, observing the protocols more wisely, report, "Lord, your *mna* has made ten *mnas* more," which Derrett (1966, 190) correctly characterizes as "a piece of etiquette as prudent as it must have been usual." However, if the codification was intended to highlight the role of retainers, then the wording in Matthew would call attention to their activity rather than mask it beneath the more courtly wording found in Luke.

The praise offered by the oppressive aristocrat mystifies the ugly realities suppressed beneath the profit margin: "Well done, good and trustworthy slave." Both retainers are good in terms of the aristocrat's values because they have proven to be effective exploiters of the peasants, and they have been trustworthy because they have produced a level of increased wealth in line with the aristocrat's expectations. The sheer extent of the aristocrat's wealth comes through his follow-up: "You have been trustworthy in a few

things.” Five talents! Two talents! A few things! It is hard to grasp the steep curve of wealth concentration in agrarian societies. Those in the ruling class, roughly the top 2 percent of the population, controlled the vast majority of the wealth. In this lofty circle of power, wealth was reckoned in talents, which were but a “few things.” Even allowing for some conspicuous exaggeration on the part of the aristocrat to impress the servants by alluding to the vastness of his wealth, his comments are accurate. The promise follows his praise: “I will put you in charge of many things.” Each servant has gained a more powerful position in the elite’s household bureaucracy, but their dependency as clients has also been reinforced. The clients are never allowed to forget who is the source of their patronage.

Unspoken in this exchange but very much on the retainers’ minds is the continued opportunity for “honest graft” while in the master’s service. Little wonder the satisfied aristocrat mystifies the whole cycle of oppression by inviting them to “enter into the joy of *your* master.” Whether or not the master ironically uses language that mimics an invitation to a messianic banquet, he is inviting his clients into a celebration of their plenty in the midst of others’ deprivation and want. The exchange between master and servants exemplifies the rhetoric of honor. The master commends the servants’ acquisitive instincts and labels them honorable. By treating his wealth as they did, they showed that they honored their master. But the atmosphere will soon change.

The third servant is clearly the focus of the parable. He receives as much attention as the first two servants combined. Aside from the fact that this servant belongs to the inner circle and enjoys the master’s trust, the hearer knows nothing about him and expects him to follow the lead of the other retainers. There is, no doubt, a repertoire of scenarios available to Jesus. Perhaps the servant will enter into partnership with the poor, which, according to the rabbis, is greater than offering charity (Derrett 1966, 186). But instead he buries the talent in the ground. By doing so, he takes the best available precaution against theft and liability (Jeremias 1963, 61n51; et al.). Thus, unlike his Lukan counterpart, who merely wraps the talent in a cloth napkin, the servant in Matthew is not careless of the wealth placed in his care. His action establishes him as prudent and sober, but it does not prepare the hearers for what follows.

When called before his aristocratic patron, the third servant's speech would have astonished the hearers. Derrett (1966, 191–92) thinks the "sauciness of the speech is fascinating" because "it both upbraids and defies," but his characterization already hints that it is also an indefensible speech, delivered by a whining servant who blames the master for not having enough confidence in him to trust him with a really important task. It is not so much the sauciness of the speech that sets it apart as its honesty. The third retainer cuts through the mystifying rhetoric that has dominated the exchange between the elite and his first two retainers, and he identifies the aristocrat for what he is, strict, cruel, harsh, and merciless (BAGD, s.v. *sklēros*, 756). In effect, he shames his master through his unexpected attack.

More to the point, the third retainer describes the aristocrat as an exploiter who lives off of the productive labor of others. The master takes the lion's share of the harvest that others have sown, and he gathers in (*synagōn*) what others have winnowed (*dieskorpisas*). In Luke 15:13 the same two verbs appear together, where they carry metaphoric meanings important to this speech. In Luke, the verb "gather in" suggests the conversion of goods to cash, a meaning that is appropriate here. The aristocrat monetizes the wheat that others have winnowed. The prodigal's scattering of his monetized inheritance is translated as "squandering" or "wasting." The secondary meaning is apt. What does the aristocrat do with the wealth he has "gathered in" or monetized? He squanders it in riotous living, in socially approved forms of conspicuous consumption and status display. Indeed, as John Kautsky (1982, 187–97) has shown, excess and wasteful consumption is a value to be pursued because it displays a wealth so great that waste does not threaten it. If the third servant's speech conveys these connotations beneath an apparently innocent description of gathering in sheaves of wheat and winnowing them, he is making a wry comment on the aristocrat's style of life.

At one level, the retainer has simply described the aristocrat, using terms that the master himself accepts. In his wrathful retort, the aristocrat never denies the truth of the servant's description, because he understands exploitation and wasteful living as honorable. But the third servant has named the master and his occupation from another point of view. In light of the courteous and high-sounding phrases that have marked the speech of the master and his two retainers, the third servant's remarks serve a critical purpose. They expose the sham of what has transpired and place it under

the unobstructed light of clear analysis and prophetic judgment. Within the context of the codification of retainer life, the third servant analyzes the scenes that have just occurred by supplying what was missing from them but assumed by them. He makes the connections that comprehend the first two scenes as part of a coherent whole. Finally, to cover himself, he returns to the master what is his. In his actions, he wants to show himself an honorable person.

The judgment is immediate. Having spoken the truth, the servant must be vilified, shamed, and humiliated so that his words will carry no weight. It comes in the form of an address, “wicked and lazy slave.” The master does hear the servant’s words as “saucy” (so Derrett), but the context within the codification is important. It is an oppressive elite who labels the servant “wicked” and “lazy” for the purpose of stigmatizing him and dismissing his implied criticism. Why should the hearer take the elite’s word for it? Is it evil to return to the master what was his? Is it indolent to take proper precaution to safeguard the talent? The aristocratic master’s address is not to be taken at face value, as so many commentators have done. It is an attack on a whistle-blower. The servant has unmasked the “joy of the master” for what it is, the profits of exploitation squandered in wasteful excess, and he has demystified “good” and “trustworthy” by exposing the merciless oppression they define.

The extent of the master’s greed may be exposed by his reference to the bankers (*trapezitēs*), although the reference is not completely clear. The reference goes beyond money changers who dealt mostly in relatively small change. Bankers were more like merchants who worked with capital in investment ventures, although they could limit themselves to small, safe, and quite secure schemes that would realize a low profit margin of about 25 percent (Derrett 1966, 192). In terms of the parable, the reference signals the degree to which the economy is commercialized and money is used to make money, as well as the degree to which the master is willing to go to accumulate wealth. No stone is to be left unturned. He shows no qualms about lending money at interest. In fact, his rapacity is little more than a cruel mockery of the Torah obligations of the wealthy to lend to the poor, including the stipulation that the lender take no interest from the poor (cf. Lev. 25:35–38; Deut. 15:7–11). As encountered earlier in the case of the lord of the vineyard (cf. Matt. 20:1–16), this elite also views his wealth as

“what [is] my own,” not as a trust from Yahweh to be administered in the interest of the poor of the land.

The consequence of the judgment is obvious: the aristocrat deprives the third servant of the talent and gives it to the most productive retainer. It is most likely that something like v. 30 concluded the parable. It described the banishment of the whistle-blower into the dark world of poverty, misery, and certain death. Once shunned by the aristocrat and banished to the role of day laborer, the third servant was on a one-way street to extinction. Such was the price paid for telling the truth. Whistle-blowers usually meet such fates. In its present form, v. 30 is redacted to serve as an image of the last judgment, but in strangely appropriate ways, it remains a description of the life of the poor. Gnashing of teeth can refer to the sound of chattering teeth caused by being in the cold without adequate clothing or shelter, or it can refer to the sound of teeth grinding because one is in pain or deep anguish. When used with the definite article, as it is in v. 30, “weeping” (*ho klauthmos*) describes extreme behavior (BAGD 433). Thus, taken together, weeping and gnashing of teeth accompany those moments that tear life apart and change it forever. No doubt, peasants gnashed their teeth when they lost their family plots or saw their subsistence threatened by new tributes and extractions, and after they became day laborers, inadequately clothed and poorly fed, their teeth chattered in the cold.

Douglas Oakman (1985; 1986) has described the dynamics of debt as they impacted peasant households. The constant pressure of tribute taking and toll impositions on the peasant population had the effect of forcing many free peasants into increasingly dependent forms of labor. Even those who managed to survive would have had to have made hard choices, such as letting the weak and infirm die or expelling excess children to the world of the day laborer. Whether a peasant managed to maintain his patrimonial plot or lost it, he would be involved in weeping and gnashing of teeth. The third servant was being thrown out of a comfortable household into a world where the sounds of grief and anguish were facts of everyday life, so the latter part of the saying makes a certain kind of sense when applied to his situation.

The Codification of the Good Retainer

The hero of the parable is the third servant. By digging a hole and burying the aristocrat's talent in the ground, he has taken it out of circulation. It cannot be used to dispossess more peasants from their lands through its dispersion in the form of usurious loans. By his actions, the third retainer dissociates himself from the system he has so cleverly exploited to attain his position of power and influence. No motivation is given or needs to be; a figure is known by his actions, not by his internal ruminations. When the hero speaks, he utters in the full light of day what he has learned in the dark; he reveals what has been covered beneath the public rhetoric of praise and promise, makes known what has been hidden beneath the mystifications of the elites, proclaims clearly what has only been whispered among the elites and their retainers (cf. Matt. 10:26–27). He describes the master for what he is and acknowledges his fear of his power. The whistle-blower is no fool. He realizes that he will pay a price, but he has decided to accept the cost rather than continue to pursue his exploitive path.

The servant faces a problem. He has blown the cover story and disclosed the real story, but he has acted alone. He has no support for his action. Having broken his solidarity with the other retainers, he has nowhere to go. Consequently, when he denies the self he was becoming, he is cut off from the land of the living. Because he has been an oppressor, he will receive little sympathy or support from peasants and other rural poor. He acts alone, and he is vulnerable to aristocratic wrath. As long as whistle-blowers act alone, they can be handled, just as the owner of the vineyard singled out and handled the spokesman of the early morning workers. When one acts alone, one dies alone.

The codification most likely created empathy for the third servant. He said what the hearers had always wanted to say and right to the master's face! By hiding the talent, he also revealed that the retainers were necessary to the process of exploitation carried on by the aristocracy. What would happen if retainers identified with the peasants rather than the aristocracy? What would it mean for them to realize that their interests really do not lie with the aristocracy that exploits them and despises them even as it uses them? What would happen if retainers refused to carry out their assigned tasks?

To the hearers, the codification also posed critical issues. How would you react to a whistle-blower? Would a former retainer find a welcome in a peasant village? Or would the former hostilities suffocate even the

possibility of a latter-day coalition? Do the people of the land realize the role played by retainers? Do they understand how their bitter animosity toward them plays into the hands of the ruling elite? Can peasants and rural poor folks realize how their interests can be tied to the very class of people whom they despise?

These are difficult questions with which to grapple, especially when one lives in the outer darkness, far from the centers of power and light, struggling to survive from day to day, weeping and gnashing teeth.

PART 3

Opening Up New Possibilities: Challenging the Limits

The parables in part 2 of this study codified the universe of oppression within which Jesus and his followers lived. They re-presented critical moments in which the often invisible systems of exploitation were revealed and made available for closer inspection. The parables of part 3 offer glimpses into another reality in which the strictures of limit situations lead to courses of action that surprise and open up new possibilities.

Chapter 10 takes up the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector (Luke 18:9–14). This parable presents an outcast claiming a benefit from the redemptive media represented by the Temple system of sacrifice and prayer and throws the relationship between deviance and prominence into question. Chapter 11 interprets the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–8), which places the hearer in the middle of a peasant village where the actors play out the values of peasant life. By holding up this simple example of hospitality and redistribution as an inkling of the values of the reign of God, Jesus honored the values of a village community and, by implication, judged the values of accumulation and conspicuous consumption that were pursued by urban elites. Chapter 12 deals with the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8), whose low motives and shameless behavior provide an example of an outrageous justice that is greater than all the righteousness that the Torah, dominated by its elite interpreters, could provide. Chapter 13 focuses its attention on the parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1–9), whose coyote-like behavior disrupts the usual social scripts and leads to an unexpected moment of liminal community.

The parables studied in part 3 focus on the possibilities of a new reality and explore what kinds of actions could transform the dead-end limits of oppression into the boundaries where genuine social change might begin. As with the selection of parables in part 2, the parables chosen here reflect only a sample of the possibilities offered by the approach pursued in this study. Limitations of space prevent the application of this hermeneutical approach to other parables.

10

The Deviant and Prominent Toll Collectors

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Toll Collector (Luke 18:9–14)

The parable found in Luke 18:9–14 is traditionally called either the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector or the Pharisee and the publican, both of which are misnomers. As John Donahue (1971) has shown, the *telōnēs* of the parable is a toll collector, not a tax collector. The significance of this distinction is explained later in this chapter, but it is a distinction that guides the use of language throughout the chapter. This study consistently refers to the toll collector rather than the tax collector.

The parable is most often read as a contrast between two types of piety, the arrogant self-righteousness of the Pharisee and the humble dependence on God's mercy of the toll collector. The argument of this chapter is that the parable codifies prominence and deviance to disclose how thin the line is that divides the one from the other. The unexpected ending of the parable also sets the Temple and Pharisaic reading of the Torah against God's justification of the toll collector. The effect of this surprise ending is to undermine the authority of the redemptive media and to pose another source of "right judgment."

The Lukan Reading of the Parable

The parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector is located near the end of the Lukan travel narrative that begins at 9:51 and concludes either at

19:27 or 19:44. The parable also brings to a close Luke's use of his distinctive materials in the journey section. Beginning with 18:15, the blessing of the children, Luke returns to the Markan narrative framework.

What does the parable mean in its Lukan setting? William Manson (1930, 202) connected the parable with Luke 18:1–8 (the unjust judge) on the grounds that both dealt with "effectual prayer," and Joachim Jeremias (1963, 87) concurred that the two parables in Luke 18:1–14 belonged together because they summed up how one should pray: "Prayer should be persistent and humble." In a similar vein, A. Plummer (1896, 420) conceived the parable as presenting a contrast between two attitudes, "self-humiliation [and] self-satisfaction." However, not every interpreter who groups the parables together has found their message focused on prayer. E. Earle Ellis (1966, 214), for instance, believed that both belong to a brief Lukan eschatological discourse (16:14—18:14) and therefore speak of "the coming of the kingdom." He also found a strong corollary between the parable and the Pauline understanding of justification. F. W. Danker (1969, 296) thought that both parables deal with "the spirit of acceptance" necessary for the kingdom. The one teaches persistence in prayer and the other "humility." In different ways, both parables proclaim the "basic principle of the Kingdom: The mighty will be brought low and the humble will be exalted."

While there may be a general consensus about the parable, it is not complete. Some interpreters sever the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector from the parable of the unjust judge, arguing that the latter (Luke 18:1–8) concludes the discourse about the coming Son of man (Luke 17:20—18:8). In a different vein, Charles Talbert (1982, 170–72) connected the parable with its sequel, the blessing of the children (18:15–17), which, he contended, illustrated its meaning: both parable and sequel exhibit "the general theme of status reversal. . . . The New Age will overturn the values and structures of the present evil age." I. Howard Marshall (1978, 677) thought that the parable announces a more general theme, "the scope of salvation," that unites Luke 18:9—19:10. The section opens (18:9–14) and closes (19:1–10) with references to toll collectors, which form an *inclusio*. In this section, Luke discloses "divine grace" as the indispensable key that unlocks the gates of the kingdom and provides the foundation required for faithfulness. Joseph Fitzmyer (1985, 1185) also found echoes of justification in the parable but was cautious about connecting it with Paul,

because the reference to justification in the parable has its roots in the Old Testament and contains no mention of the cross.

In spite of their apparent variety, these differences are rather narrow in scope, for there is virtual unanimity on the basic meaning of the parable. It contrasts two types of figures and their behavior (Marshall 1978, 677). The differences among interpreters are a function of the degree to which they abstract the two characters into universal types. At one end of the spectrum, interpreters provide detailed information about Pharisees and toll collectors for the purpose of trying to locate them in first-century Palestinian society. Thus T. W. Manson (1949, 310) interprets them as "the two extremes in Judaism" in the first century, one living by scrupulous observance of the Torah, the other failing miserably to approach that ideal. Still others begin with such ambitions but are so heavily influenced by Luke's contrasting types that they select only enough details to establish their typology: Pharisees represent a type of self-confident righteousness that claims merit for itself even as it despises and condemns others, while toll collectors represent humble, repentant sinners who call on the mercy of God. At the other end of the spectrum, the two figures are transformed into "universal" abstract types or examples of our common humanity. As A. T. Cadoux (1931, 58) puts it, some parables "are stories of a human situation universalized by the elimination of the unessential." In this framework, the two figures become examples of the proud and the humble, the church member and the politician (Ellis 1966), the pious liberal and the dishonest defiled (Talbert 1982), and so forth. More recently, F. Gerald Downing (1992, 80–99) has called into question the oppositional structure of the parable by suggesting that the prayers of both figures are caricatures. Neither one is presented for the purpose of emulation; both provide examples of inadequate prayer.

The Parable of Jesus

Form-critical efforts to reconstruct a parable of Jesus behind the Lukan text have also generated a basic consensus.

18:9	Lukan framing
18:10–13	Jesus' parable (option 1)
18:10–14a	Jesus' parable (option 2)

18:14b independent saying

Most interpreters agree that it is necessary to eliminate the Lukan framing, 18:9, and the generalizing conclusion in 18:14b, which is an independent logion (cf. Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11). The main question is whether 18:14a belongs with the parable as Jesus' concluding remark or should be seen as a Lukan conclusion in the form of direct discourse. The phrase "I tell you" would then be an attachment formula translated from the third person ("and he said") to the first person. This study reads the phrase "I tell you" as a Lukan insertion to stress the conclusion to the parable, which is contained in the rest of v. 14a: "This man went down to his home justified rather than the other." In this case, the insertion is not so much an attachment formula connecting previously disconnected material but an emphasis formula pointing to the importance of the words that follow.

What can be conjectured about the parable's setting in Jesus' ministry? Jeremias (1963, 93, 124) understood its original setting to be polemical. The parable was told to show Jesus' opponents "God's pity for the humble and the despised." Like other parables that announce the good news itself, it was addressed "not to the poor, but to opponents" as a "defence and vindication of the gospel." The parable was, in effect, a weapon wielded against those who were indignant that Jesus should declare God's love for sinners, especially by his practice of eating with them. Through the parable, Jesus defended his practice by declaring, "[God] welcomes the despairing, hopeless sinner, and rejects the self-righteous. . . . that is how [God] is now acting through me" (Jeremias 1963, 144). In spite of its controversial tone, however, Jeremias contended that the parable was told not to alienate Jesus' opponents but to win them over. Just how the parable would accomplish that end he did not venture to guess.

Others were less reticent about addressing that question. Eta Linnemann (1966, 60–64) proposed that the parable exposed a hidden contradiction in its hearers. These hearers appealed to the standards of the law to justify themselves in comparison with others, but when they were convicted by a guilty conscience, they appealed to a verdict that transcended the law. But this practice must mean that the law cannot stand as a final appeal, if it is invoked when judging others but abrogated when one stands in need of grace. What one claims for oneself must also be made available for one's neighbor. To consent to this, however, Jesus' hearers had to experience "a

radical conversion and let God's grace be the final appeal for their own lives" as well as for the lives of their neighbors. But if they refused and continued to insist on righteousness according to the law, they would not tolerate "one who bears witness to the truth they have resisted" (Linnemann 1966, 63). The obvious difficulty with this discussion is that it seems more deeply indebted to sixteenth-century Reformation theology than to the practices and beliefs that animated Judaism during the first century.

Following a suggestion made by R.B.Y. Scott, Pheme Perkins (1981, 172) believed that the parable was based on a Galilean proverb, "Better a tax collector than a Pharisee self-righteous before God." Taking its cue from the wisdom saying, the parable condemns the self-righteous Pharisee rather than commends the toll collector. The parable goes a step beyond the proverb, however, because a Pharisee could utter the proverb (Pharisees were, after all, aware of the dangers of pride) but could not tell such a parable. By stretching the proverb, the parable seeks the assent of its hearers: "Even you would rather be a tax collector than a Pharisee" (Perkins 1981, 173). In this way, the parable, by seeking their consent to its premise, reassures the wary who may be wondering about a movement that includes undesirables.

T. W. Manson (1949, 312) concluded that the parable was indeed intended to appeal to its hearers by proclaiming that "every moment before God is an opportunity to have life determined by the future rather than the past." If so, then the Pharisee and the toll collector represent two figures whose past histories, disparate though they be, are no more than two preconditions that must be overcome before they can encounter God. It presents a worst-case scenario to declare that no past history is so bleak as to preclude the possibility of such an encounter.

The Lukan Parable and the Parable of Jesus

Interpreters of the Lukan parable, guided by Luke's framing and generalizing conclusion, were able to accept Luke's contrasting types and build their interpretations around them. Interpreters of Jesus' parable, taking their cue from Jeremias, have focused, as he did, on the toll collector whose appeal for mercy became a model for how anyone can experience grace. Cadoux (1931, 216) opines, "Upon [the toll collector's] penitently bowed

head, God can place the hand of forgiveness." B. T. D. Smith (1937, 178) concludes "that a penitent tax collector ranks higher in [God's] sight [than] a self-satisfied Pharisee." W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 230) finds that the attitude and disposition of a person "affects the efficacy of prayer." Dan Via (1967, 120–21) discovers the verdict to be "that one is sustained by a transcendent and unprovable ground" and can therefore "risk one's security." John Dominic Crossan (1973, 69) seeks and finds "the complete, radical polar reversal of accepted human judgment, even or especially of religious judgment, whereby the kingdom forces its way into human awareness." And Bernard Scott (1989, 97) at first reads the ending as an example of first-century minimalist art (it is not an example story because "there is no lesson to learn") before returning to his senses and discovering that "the parable subverts the metaphorical structure that sees the kingdom of God as temple." In this context, the Pharisee became more of a foil for the mercy extended to the toll collector.

But the change of emphasis did not alter the interpreters' basic reading of the parable. It remained a parable of two types, both of whom were understood in theological terms. The sole voice dissenting from this reading has been that of Downing (1992, 80–99), who found some support from Luise Schottroff's (1973) reading of the Pharisee as a caricature.

Once again, Luke's investing of the parable with theological values, made visible in his framing and the attached saying, has shaped subsequent readings of the text. Following Luke, every interpreter, whether construing the parable in its Lukan setting or in a proposed setting in Jesus' ministry, has pursued a similar investment strategy. Their varied readings have merely diversified Luke's portfolio.

The Parable of the Two Toll Collectors

How does the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector read as codification? The parable is set in a specific place, and its characters are not abstract types but representatives of a social faction and a social group. To understand the parable, one must know who appears in its social script and the significance of their location.

The Temple and the Redemptive Media

The parable depicts two men coming to the Temple precincts (*hieron*) to pray at one of the daily sacrifices, most likely the afternoon sacrifice when a congregation was normally present. After the sacrifice had been offered and during the burning of the incense, the congregation gathered in the court would offer prayers (Bailey 1980, 146; Safrai 1977, 288).

The setting of the parable in the Temple precincts is important because the Temple was the primary place where the redemptive media of Palestine were institutionalized. (For an extended discussion of the role of the redemptive media in society, see Burridge 1969 and Isenberg 1975.) Together with the Torah, which provided ideological support for the role of the Temple and spelled out the nature of obligation to it, the Temple dominated the life of the people of the land, whether they lived in Galilee or Judaea. Indeed, the Temple's ideological reach extended throughout the Diaspora, as the collection of the Temple tax from every observent Jewish man so clearly indicated.

The earlier discussion (in chapter 4) of the means by which a small elite extracted the surplus produced by peasants referred to Gerhard and Jean Lenski (1982, 173) on the important role played by temples:

> Technological advance creates the possibility of a surplus, but to transform that possibility into reality requires an ideology that motivates [peasants] to produce more than they need . . . and persuades them to turn that surplus over to someone else. . . . A system of beliefs that defined people's obligations . . . to the supernatural was best suited to play this critical role.

The dual role mentioned here is noteworthy. First, the apparatus of Temple and sacred texts had to define the nature of the obligation or indebtedness incumbent on every member of the society. Only when this debt was identified and its ideological justifications were articulated in a persuasive manner would the second function, extraction of a surplus, be feasible. But when the people consented to the normative reading of reality propagated from the Temple by means of sacred texts and the proper interpretation of those texts, they had to surrender their surplus to the Temple to discharge their obligation to the constituting power of their society (God or some

pantheon of gods) through the officially sanctioned redemptive media. In this setting, taxation became an act of devotion to the sacred because it fulfilled important prescriptions for maintaining a healthy relationship with the God who called the people into existence and made them a great nation. Sheldon Isenberg (1975, 27) put it succinctly:

> All of it is bound up in obligation to the constituting power. . . . Society provides the ways by which debt may be discharged. . . . The ways which society provides for the discharge of indebtedness are the redemptive media.

In Galilee and Judaea, the bringing of tithes to the Temple was one important way in which the people acknowledged their debt to Yahweh, who brought them out of slavery in Egypt and gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. It was also a way of ensuring good crops for the following year, because any laxity toward Yahweh could produce dire consequences. Conversely, not to render to God what is God's left one stigmatized and forever indebted. Whatever fate befell a debtor in this context was little more than the just retribution of God for failing to participate in the redemptive media.

Of course, this system worked to the benefit of priestly and non-priestly elites in Jerusalem as well. The tithes rendered to the Temple supported the elite priestly families, and the second tithe, which was supposed to be spent in Jerusalem, enriched the other elite families of the city. Even if the people of the land had to impoverish themselves to pay their tribute, they were expected to accept the price. In consequence of this system, common peasants lived in squalor while they paid their Temple tribute to support the conspicuous consumption of urban elites in Jerusalem, and if they refused, then they were vilified and stigmatized.

Tribute and Tolls

During Jesus' time, Palestine was under a heavy burden of taxation. Imperial Rome exacted tribute from Judaea directly through its colonial bureaucracy and, in Galilee, indirectly through their client, Antipas. The poll tax and the land tax were the two primary taxes collected by the Romans. Both reflect the "proprietary theory of the state" (Lenski 1966, 214) common in agrarian societies. Domination conferred the right to exact

tribute, and subjugated provinces such as Judaea or client states such as Antipas's Galilee and Perea were treated as profitable estates. Lenski's description (1966, 215–16) is apt: "All agrarian rulers enjoyed significant proprietary rights in virtually all of the land in their domains," and because "property consists basically of rights, not of things," they extracted tribute accordingly.

The purpose of taxation was not social well-being but enhancement of the position of elites. Bruce Malina (1988, 4n4) notes, "As a rule patron-client societies are extensive and extractive; leadership is concerned with plundering rather than developing, and taxation exists for the benefit of elites, not for the common good." The governing class members participated in the exploitive system by accumulating as much "honest graft" (socially accepted forms of extortion) as possible during their terms of service. Such "honest graft" could total many times a person's regular income for serving in such positions. And what the ruling class did, the retainers imitated, though on a smaller scale.

In addition to collection of direct taxes, Roman occupiers and internal Jewish rulers alike collected a vast array of indirect taxes in the form of tolls, imposts, duties, tariffs, and so forth. Because the collection of direct taxes was in the hands of the social elites and their hirelings, and because the process was protected by the military power of the state, tax collectors, whether Roman or Jewish, would live beyond the reach of most popular hostility, though they would be hated nonetheless. In his investigation of the relevant terms for officials participating in the system of exacting tribute, Donahue (1971, 53) noted that the Talmud could waver in its evaluation of tax collectors but not in its estimation of toll collectors, who were universally despised. Toll collectors, who actually staffed the booths and cheated the public on behalf of the chief toll collectors or toll farmers whom they served, were visible and socially vulnerable. On them fell the full force of popular resentment toward the whole oppressive system in which they were but minor functionaries.

Roman taxation was not the sole burden in the land. Temple taxation was equally oppressive, although it was mystified and represented in the form of religious obligation. F. C. Grant (1926, 94ff.) enumerated twelve different taxes prescribed in the Torah. The large number of exactions arose from "the combination of the older requirements (found, for example, in Deuteronomy) with the later (those of the priestly code)" and "vastly

increased the obligations of the people." Marcus Borg (1984, 32) reduced this list to three major taxes: (1) the annual "wave offering" or first fruits, probably from 1 to 3 percent of the produce; (2) the annual first tithe, provided to support the priests and levites; (3) the second tithe, used for different purposes during the six-year cycle between sabbatical years. Other taxes were far less significant. Thus the total on agricultural produce was between 21 and 23 percent. Given the fact that most peasant farmers existed at the subsistence level, Grant (1926, 97) is right in concluding, "The sum total of religious obligations levied upon the people . . . was nothing short of enormous." But the Temple authorities were not about to lessen the burden and forfeit their privileges. Richard Horsley (1987, 29) agrees with this assessment:

> Neither the Romans nor the Jewish aristocracy were about to forego their income by reducing their demands. Instead they collaborated in the effective exploitation of the largely peasant producers. . . . Instrumental in maintaining the structure of violence that perpetuated or exacerbated the injustices were some of the sacred traditions.

The Temple system was no less oppressive than Roman occupation, but the combination of the two systems of tribute produced a crisis among the peasant population base. The peasants could not avoid direct Roman taxation, administered as it was by Roman bureaucrats working with Jewish elites in Judaea or by Herodian retainers in Galilee, because both groups were supported by direct military force. But they could avoid Temple tribute, which could not be compelled, although in doing so they faced social ostracism, shunning, and vilification by Temple authorities. It was this situation that seems to have created a growing class of peasants, artisans, and other rural workers known as the *am-ha-aretz* (cf. Borg 1984, 33, for similar analysis).

If one accepts Horsley's definition of violence as "violation of person-hood," and if one recognizes that much of the violence against persons is accomplished covertly through institutions and structures, then it becomes increasingly clear that the Temple, in some important respects, represented such an institution. The important point is that what appeared to be a condemnation of the peasant farmers of the land for their laxity in keeping

the Torah masked the economic bind that forced them to withhold their tithes for the sake of survival. The demands of the Torah were being formulated in such a way that they created a class of poor peasants who were unable to meet its tithing requirements. Rather than acknowledge the contradiction, scribal retainers mystified it by negatively labeling the peasants and branding them as enemies of the Torah. In this way, the peasants' actual cycle of perpetual indebtedness was seen as a reflection of their Torah laxity. Unable to meet their tithing obligations, they were depicted as unwilling to fulfill the requirements of the redemptive media. Once they had been so labeled, their further exploitation and degradation were made easier; they were no longer the people of God, whose covenant with Yahweh resided in their patrimonial plot of land, but rebellious reprobates, whose refusal to pay their tithes threatened the well-being of the land.

Understood within the framework being developed here, the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector is "the parable of the two toll collectors." Like the toll collector who is a functionary in the Roman system, the Pharisee is a retainer in the Temple system. Through the network of synagogues, the Pharisee and his faction participated in efforts to enforce the collection of tithes, but their major role was ideological, as reflected in their polemics and rhetorical efforts to persuade. The Pharisee's emphasis on tithes in his prayer indicates his role in sanctioning tithes and placing them at the center of the requirements for ritual purity.

This is the emphasis at the heart of the Pharisee's prayer, and it discloses a larger role played by the scribal Pharisees. They converted the debt codes of the Torah into purity or pollution codes. As noted in chapter 5, Fernando Belo's (1981, 37–59) rendering of "the symbolic order of ancient Israel" identified two distinct systems in the Torah, "a system of pollution or contagion and a system of debt," each of which was applied to the table, the household, and the Temple. The pollution code was designed to avoid "the violence of contagion" or uncleanness through elaborate classifications of persons, places, events, and times into purity lists or "maps" revealing the relative cleanness or uncleanness of their members (Neyrey 1986, 91–128) and classifications of incompatible pairs (cf. Deut. 22:9–11). The codes elaborated the two basic principles "of compatibility and difference." The purpose of these purity codes was to define a place for everything and to keep everything in its place. By keeping the boundaries clearly defined and

strongly enforced, the Pharisee intended to avoid the violence ensuing from the pollution of the clean by the unclean and thereby to fulfill the command "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). At the table, this concern's focus ranged from the kinds of food one could or could not eat to the vessels in which the food was prepared to the condition of those who prepared it and of the ones with whom one could eat it (Neusner 1979, 82–90; for a more extended treatment of purity, see Neusner 1973). In the household, purity concerns defined whom one could or could not marry as well as the taboos that defined sexual boundaries. In the Temple, they defined the ritual condition of the priests and Levites as well as the kinds of sacrifices that one could and could not offer.

Within the parameters of the purity codes, everything was either pure or polluted, and the purpose of the codes was to keep lines firmly drawn between the two conditions and those who lived in them. A purity culture would be inordinately concerned about boundaries and classifications within boundaries. Set within this framework, the Pharisee and the toll collector represent one more incompatible pair, the clean and the unclean.

The debt codes of the Torah began with a different starting point, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . . and I have come down to deliver [you] from the Egyptians, and to bring [you] up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 20:2; 3:8), and the codes elaborate the two mutually exclusive principles of "gift and debt" (Belo 1981, 39). If the land is the gift of Yahweh, then all the people are debtors to Yahweh because the land on which they live belongs to Yahweh. Yahweh's ownership of the land is the reason the land and its wealth can be redistributed on sabbatical and jubilee years. More to the point, the land was given to be a blessing to the people, a blessing realized in the principle of "extension." Extension here means the extension of the assets of the land and its wealth to all the people. Extension is to be practiced as a way of warding off the threat of "restriction," that is, the forces of "theft, murder, aggression, hostility [and] desolation" (Belo 1981, 39) that threaten the bodies who inhabit the land.

Like the pollution codes, the debt codes were applied to the realms of table, household, and Temple. At table, the tithe expressed the principle of extension, especially the provision that tithes be distributed every third year to the landless (Deut. 26:12) and the provisions allowing the needy to glean the fields and orchards after harvest. The ideal of the debt code was

expressed in Deut. 15:4–5, the hope that there would be no poor in the land if the principle of extension were observed. The more one received, the more one was to give. The practices of generosity and hospitality were also intended to act as a shield against the restriction that lay hidden in the debt codes. The very desire to accumulate wealth in order to realize the blessing activated the "aggressive violence" that turned against the neighbor's source of subsistence and sought to gain even more at the expense of others (Exod. 20:15, 17). This was the hidden contradiction contained in the debt codes of the Torah. Over time, they generated the very kind of society that they were designed to restrict. In the household, the principle of extension applied to the procreation of children and restricted adultery, killing, and defamation (Exod. 20:13, 14, 16). In the Temple, the debt code defined the sacrifices extended to Yahweh as well as the times and festivals dedicated to celebrating Yahweh's beneficence and renewing the remembrance of Yahweh's gift of the land from which all blessing flowed.

The two codes of the Torah are not necessarily complementary, so the nature of their relationship to each other is important to define. Essentially, the scribal Pharisees made the debt code a function of the purity code. The failure to pay tithes rendered one impure, and once impure, one remained forever in debt, unable to satisfy the demands of the redemptive media. This theological move was made to support the economic base of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was dependent on agricultural tithes. The move ignored the reasons the people of the land were unable to pay their tributary tithes to the Temple by increasing pressure on them to do so and stigmatizing them for their failure. It also conveniently overlooked the role of the Temple as an institution of extension by converting it into an institution of accumulation. In the process, debt became a form of impurity.

What would occur if the purity codes were interpreted as a function of the debt codes? The poverty of the people would not be viewed primarily as an indicator of their impurity but as a sign of the failure of the principle of extension. This approach would shift the responsibility from the victims—the people of the land—to the elites. The purity codes provided an ideological framework for blaming the victims; the debt codes turned their attention to the acquisitive ruling classes. In this context, debt was seen as the result of human manipulation of the Torah to justify the very violent aggression against the neighbors' source of subsistence that the debt code intended to alleviate or stop.

In regard to the two figures in the parable, the Pharisee is a purity figure whose prayer identifies how the debt code has been incorporated into the purity code and made a function of it. The toll collector is a “debt” figure whose plight traces to the loss of the generosity that the debt codes were intended to generate. But these figures are disguised in the parable as the clean and the unclean or the prominent Pharisee and the deviant toll collector.

It is time to examine the two figures more closely.

The Two Toll Collectors

The scene of the parable, then, is a court in the Temple precincts where a group had gathered, including the two figures mentioned, both of whom stand apart from the crowd. The toll collector “stood far off,” apart from the congregation of the faithful, “most likely ostracized by other worshippers because of his suspected ritual impurity” (Donahue 1988, 189). When the officiating priest entered the Holy Place to offer the incense, “the delegation of Israel (Maamad) was responsible for making the unclean stand at the Eastern Gate” (Bailey 1980, 149; cf. Danby 1933, 587). Perhaps, in anticipation of the moment, the toll collector had stationed himself near the gate so as to avoid being shamed by the Temple officials.

No less apart from the congregation stood the Pharisee. His reasons for standing apart were most likely related to his purity concerns. He did not want to risk contracting uncleanness from brushing the garment of an *am-ha-aretz*, that is, “those Jews who were ignorant of the Law and who failed to observe the rules of cleanness and uncleanness and were not scrupulous in setting apart Tithes from the produce” (Danby 1933, 793; cf. Oppenheimer 1977, 1–98). The toll collector stood far off, apart from the congregation, because he was a deviant shunned by the faithful, and the Pharisee stood apart to emphasize his prominence.

To sustain this interpretation means deciding a thorny problem, namely, whether *pros heauton* means that the Pharisee prayed to himself or stood by himself. If the former, then the phrase means that the Pharisee either prayed silently or just under his breath. But a quiet prayer does not advance the confrontation in the parable, and the spatial designation parallels the description of the toll collector. The parable parallels the figures in two respects. The Pharisee’s posture is described briefly while his prayer is

long; the toll collector's prayer is brief while his posture is described at length. The decision to read the phrase as referring to the way the Pharisee stood also serves the purpose of the codification, because prominence and deviance are two ways of standing apart from a society's norms.

The Pharisee's prayer has been the subject of much conversation, mostly censure (Cadoux [1931, 216] is typical), although an increasing number of interpreters (Linnemann 1966; Perkins 1981; Donahue 1988; and Scott 1989) have emphasized the genuine nature of the prayer. He does give thanks to God and supersedes the commandments in his devotion, "vicariously [making] atonement for the sins of the people by fasting twice a week" (Linnemann 1966, 59). It is quite possible that Jesus' hearers would accept the prayer as expressing gratitude to God and encouraging fidelity to the Torah in Pharisaic style. He is an ideal, pious man, prominent among the members of the gathered congregation because he embodies the goal of Torah obedience (against this view, see Schottroff [1973], who argues that the Pharisee presented in the parable is a caricature).

The prayer condemns unrighteous behavior and commends life in accordance with Pharisaic rigor. But the prayer is not quite so innocuous or innocent. The Pharisee's condemnation is more pointed. What appears to be a serial list of sinners, "extortioners, swindlers and adulterers" (see Jeremias 1963, 140, for translation of *adikoi* as "swindlers"), can also be read as three ways of describing the toll collector. The key to this reading is found in the phrase "even like," which takes the puzzling phrase *ē kai hōs* to be connecting similar terms. With this sudden turn, the condemnation of sin has become the denunciation of a sinner. The Pharisee publicly shames the toll collector and, by implication, questions his right even to stand near the congregation of Israel gathered for prayer.

The drama of the moment must be appreciated. If the toll collector has stood far off to remain inconspicuous, the Pharisee stands apart to be conspicuous. At the precise moment that the officiating priest is entering the Holy Place to burn the incense, at the very moment when the people believe prayer to be most efficacious, the Pharisee steps forward and prays aloud. His prayer instructs the "less clean" around him; perhaps he even intends to persuade the delegation at the eastern gate to usher the toll collector out of the Temple court. As Donahue (1988, 188) puts it, "He conspicuously steps apart from the other worshippers and utters a prayer heard by all. He thus

accentuates his piety and humiliates the tax collector." The Pharisee has proclaimed his honor while shaming the toll collector.

The Pharisee's prayer identifies two works of supererogation. The Torah prescribed fasting for the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29–31; cf. 23:27, 29, 32; Num. 29:7) and possibly for some other occasions (Neh. 9:1; Esth. 9:31; Zech. 8:19; so Fitzmyer 1985, 1187). But the Pharisees fasted twice weekly, on Mondays and Thursdays. Later Jewish tradition explained the custom as recognizing the day that Moses ascended Mount Sinai (Thursday) and the day he descended (Monday) following his forty-day encounter with Yahweh (Fitzmyer 1985, 1187). Throughout the Old Testament, fasting could signal mourning, penance, or supplication. Thus Jeremias (1963, 140) believes that the Pharisees fasted "apparently in intercession for the sins of the people."

As in his fasting, so in his tithing the Pharisee exceeds "the positive commands of the law" (Manson 1949, 311). Deuteronomy 14:22–23 "prescribes a tithe of all the produce of one's seed, grain, wine, oil [and] firstlings of the herd and flock" (Fitzmyer 1985, 1188). By emphasizing that he tithes all that he acquires ("all my income"), the Pharisee indicates that he tithes all the food he purchases in case the producer has not done so. Therefore, he eats only tithed food. It is possible, though less likely, that the Pharisee refers to his zeal in tithing such foods as garden herbs (cf. Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42), a practice prescribed by neither the Torah nor the oral torah. His was, as Jeremias (1963, 140–41) concludes, "a signal act of voluntary self-denial: to his personal offering he added the agricultural tithe."

However much modern commentators might wish to debate with the Pharisee, they must admit that his contentions are accurate. He has described practices to which he adheres at some personal cost, and he has expressed nothing more than popular sentiment about toll collectors.

Who were these vilified toll collectors? They were neither publicans nor tax collectors. Direct taxes, such as the poll tax and the land tax, were not farmed out to publicans but were under the direct supervision of the Roman prefects and procurators in Judaea and under the supervison of Antipas in Galilee. The bureaucrats who collected the taxes were therefore state officials directly accountable to the government, and given the wide range of Jewish attitudes toward Roman rule and Herodian client rule, it is likely that Jews were involved in collecting taxes.

However, the *telōnēs* of the parable is a toll collector. Although direct taxes were not farmed out but collected directly by the government through its bureaucrats and officials, the collection of indirect taxes, such as tolls, imposts, customs, and tariffs, was leased out by means of contracts. The lessee had to pay the amount of the contract in advance and then recoup his investment and take a profit as best he could. The system was rife with extortion and dishonesty, although on a lesser scale than tax farming under the publicans had been. With good reason, the population hated the toll collectors. In an excellent study of the problem, Donahue (1971, 39–61) surveyed the relevant rabbinical literature and concluded that tax collectors and toll collectors were often grouped together with robbers but that tax collectors received a mixed press while "the judgment on toll collectors . . . remains harsh throughout the Talmud." The reason for the hostility is nowhere clearly stated, but it did not have to do with the toll collectors' employ by a foreign oppressor, Donahue surmises, as much as "the arbitrary quality of their imposts and the dishonesty which characterizes their activity" (1971, 53). They do not seem to have been considered ritually defiled by virtue of their work, but toll collecting was listed among the despised trades and toll collectors were deprived of at least some civic rights (Jeremias 1963, 141; for instance, they were unable to be witnesses at a trial), could not be admitted to a Pharisaic faction (*haburah*), and were considered beyond the reach of repentance because repentance would require both restitution of all extorted funds plus one-fifth and the abandonment of their occupation. Because toll collectors worked with a constantly changing public, there was no way they could even identify the people they had extorted, to say nothing of making restitution.

The term *ho telōnēs* could "designate functionaries or employees at the toll center (*telōnion*) as well as the rich man who buys the right to collect the tolls" (Donahue 1971, 54; cf. 58). Because Luke later describes Zacchaeus as an *architelōnēs,* a lessee or buyer of toll contracts, it is likely that *telōnēs* here is meant to refer to the low-level functionary who sat at the toll center. Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (1986, 8–9) describe such figures as "subordinates [who] must have formed a constantly changing and socially unprotected group of men: men who could find no other work and must have been glad of even this thankless task." The low-level toll collectors cheated the public on behalf of their employers, although they rarely realized any benefit or profit from their work. They

were subsistence-level wage employees used by the toll contractors and hated by nearly everyone else because of the way they were used to cheat and defraud the public. They had no bargaining power and could easily be replaced by others as desperate for work as they were.

The *telōnēs*, then, was a visible yet low-level retainer who did the actual work of collecting for wealthier retainers who bid toll contracts and paid in advance. On the head of this class was heaped the scorn and hostility of the populace. All of this means that the toll collector was a convenient target for the Pharisee's assault, for he was poor, socially vulnerable, virtually powerless and without honor, a pariah figure considered an "extortioner," a "swindler," and an adulterer of God's law. Little wonder that he dared not raise his eyes, but with head bowed and arms crossed on his chest, as was customary for one in prayer, he clenched his fists and beat his breast. Kenneth Bailey (1980, 153f.) notes that the gesture was characteristic of women (not men) at funerals; when men did it, it was a gesture of extreme sorrow and anguish. Why his breast? The breast is the seat of the heart, the source of evil and sin. As Donahue (1988, 190) notes, "He does not unroll a catalogue of sins, like the Pharisee's catalogue of virtues"; then again, he does not need to, because the Pharisee has already done it for him. His prayer is as brief as his actions are extended. "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Bailey argues that the verb does not carry a general plea for mercy but is related to the setting of the parable, the offering of the afternoon sacrifice. The verb *hilasthēti* means "make an atonement for me." Bailey's (1980, 154) description is dramatic:

> In deep remorse he strikes his chest and cries out in repentance and hope, "Oh God! Let it be for me! Make an atonement for me, a sinner!" . . . [He] longs that the great dramatic atonement sacrifice might apply to him.

Jesus' description is no less dramatic than the conclusion: "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other" (18:14a). The verb *dedikaiōmenos* has been the subject of much discussion. Jeremias and Donahue, among many others, locate it in the semantic world of the law court. Thus Jeremias (1963, 141) suggests that it means "to obtain justice, to be acquitted, to find justice, favour, grace," and Donahue (1988, 190) uses it to argue for the relation of this parable to the parable of the unjust

judge, as two examples of “trial by prayer.” The parable has proceeded something like a trial. The court of the Temple has been the scene, and the Pharisee was a credible prosecutor or accuser. Indeed, the toll collector seems instinctively to have shrunk back from the open court, perhaps hoping to find justice at the eastern gate. If his prayer can be construed as his defense, even though a toll collector could not be called as a witness, then Jesus’ pronouncement is the verdict. But such a verdict! The toll collector has made no restitution. Indeed, he probably cannot, for he could never find all the people he has cheated. He has made no reparations. Indeed, he could not, for his pay is meager, little above subsistence at best. He could not repay, to say nothing of adding one-fifth. Neither has the Pharisee apparently done anything wrong. He has thanked God and declared his love for the Torah by exceeding its prescriptions. Yet he finds no justice or favor. The ending was puzzling to its hearers, at best; this parable was truly a riddle.

Deviance and Prominence

The agonistic society in which Jesus worked was filled with factions in constant conflict.[1] Because it was a given that all goods were limited, each faction struggled with the others for its piece of the pie. Factions were also engaged in creating boundaries that defined their social territories and spheres of influence, boundaries that were constantly clashing with those drawn by other groups. The purpose of such boundary drawing was to define proper places for everything and everyone, as well as proper behavior for those who inhabited the social spheres so constructed. Inevitably, such processes generated moral meanings and defined people in relationship to them. The line that separated tithers from tithe-avoiders was such a boundary. Those who embodied the values of a group or faction in outstanding ways were labeled prominent, but those who violated the lines and lived out of bounds were labeled deviant. Deviance, like the social world in relationship to which it is defined, is a social creation (Pfuhl 1980, 15–36).

Labeling has always been an integral part of the activity of line drawing. Labels are ways of identifying the world in terms of the interests of a group or faction. When a group identifies a threat to its boundaries, it labels the threat, that is, it attaches a stigma (negative label) to the person or group in

order to assess the nature of the threat and generate a socially shared interpretation of its meaning. How is this done?

The boundaries that define groups are the result of the creation of rules, and rule creation is the work of “moral entrepreneurs,” who construct norms and apply them to the behaviors of the group so that the group can define morally adequate and inadequate standards. Moral entrepreneurs act as both rule-creators and rule-enforcers who apply the rules to specific persons; their task is to identify those norms and goals that will receive public assent and further their own interests. Such figures label as deviant a person or group who exhibits behavior that threatens the interests of the rule-creators/moral entrepreneurs.

Once identified, the label must be disseminated widely to gain broader social support and respectability. The purpose of dissemination is to raise public awareness and warn of the threat posed by the deviant. To increase their own strength, moral entrepreneurs borrow respectability through alliances with existing high-profile figures or other powerful groups, seek testimonials (from sacred texts, for example), and solicit endorsements from well-known figures (Malina n.d., 14).

During the very time moral entrepreneurs are increasing awareness of the value of the rule threatened by the deviant (tithing, for example), they must create stress in the population to persuade the people that the threat is real. This is accomplished in three ways: (1) by demonstrating that present rules do not either define the value or cover it inadequately, (2) by showing that agencies charged with enforcement of the rule are inadequate, and (3) by emphasizing the lack of means to resolve the crisis. The outcome of these strategies is an increase of alarm and pessimism in the population while loyalty and devotion to the threatened rule, value, or value system are increased. The strategies may even lead to “conversions” to a given group’s ranks (Malina n.d., 15).

Once a given group has reinforced itself through negative labeling (creating deviance) and rule creation, enhancement, and dissemination, it turns its attention to the deviant. Deviance-processing agents create a retrospective interpretation of the deviant’s life and transform his or her biography into “a case of the thing s/he is alleged to have done” (Malina n.d., 18). The stigma is on the way to becoming a “master status.” If the cycle is completed, the deviant is subjected to a status-degradation ritual (such as a trial) in which an old identity is destroyed and a new identity

created; the ritual completes the dehumanization of the deviant (Malina and Neyrey 1988).

Because prominence theory works in a structurally parallel way, the same process could be repeated in a framework of affirmation of group values, with appropriate substitutions. For example, a status-degradation ritual can become a status-elevation ritual, and the immoral behavior to be shunned can become positive behavior to be emulated and honored.

The Pharisee in the parable is from a faction of moral entrepreneurs, whose scribal members assume the role of rule-creators while other members become rule-enforcers. In this case, the Pharisee applies the standards of oral torah to the toll collector. His recitation of character traits —"extortioners, swindlers, adulterers"—stigmatizes his enemy and attaches to him a master status of "toll collector," which is evidently the equivalent of "sinner," one who lives beyond the bounds of the acceptable and the Torah-obedient. While it would be going too far to argue that the brief outburst of the Pharisee constitutes a retrospective interpretation of the toll collector's life, it does contribute to the process of depersonalizing and dehumanizing him, especially in light of the court and trial atmosphere of the parable. In any case, the outburst identifies the Pharisee as a deviance-processing agent who participates in the systematic, institutionalized violence originating from the Temple, the kind of violence that violates the personhood of the toll collector.

The Pharisee's prayer also masks the fact that he and the toll collector belong to parallel systems of tributary exaction. The Pharisee is a functionary in a larger institutionalized expression of oppression that retrospectively interprets peasant farmers as degraded dirt farmers (*am-ha-aretz*) and equates toll collectors with robbers. But one (the Pharisee) is prominent, the other (the toll collector) is deviant. In this case, the toll collector is so branded because his behavior in the service of Roman rule threatens the economic interests of the Temple-centered elites and their retainers.

Codifying Deviance, Prominence, and the Role of the Redemptive Media

As codification, the parable posed a number of problems for its hearers, assuming that they were a mixed crowd of villagers and peasants in Galilee. Why bring a toll collector and a Pharisee together? What do they have in common? Why place them in the Temple court? What has the Temple to do with the toll collector? Why does the Pharisee emphasize tithing and fasting? How could a toll collector ask for atonement without reparation? Why is he acquitted? How could he be? What does the codification say about our attitude toward toll collectors and Pharisees?

However, this parable goes beyond codifying oppression. It poses a limit situation, a sinner going to the Temple. Few, if any, of the hearers expected good results. Nothing but humiliation and shame could come from it. But the toll collector, the most shamed of the shameful, breaks the mold of expectations and changes the predicted outcome. What was the turning point? Up to the Pharisee's shaming denunciation, everything had gone according to the script. The toll collector went to the Temple, retreated to the edge of the crowd, and stationed himself by the eastern gate. The Pharisee stepped out and condemned him, speaking for the established systems of the redemptive media located in the Temple and supported by the Torah. If the toll collector had followed the script, he would have left in silence, a shamed man put in his place. But he does not go quietly. Having heard the worst that the Pharisee could throw at him, he cries out, beats his breast, and prays for mercy, the very mercy being made available through the afternoon sacrifice. He refuses to consent to the Pharisee's shaming but appeals to a higher source. He refuses to accept the labels attached to him, the stigma of toll collector, but speaks directly to God, seeking mercy. He breaks the deafening silence that followed the Pharisee's effort to reinforce the status quo. He breaks through the intimidation and fear that the Pharisee's words have created, and by his actions, he challenges the Pharisee's reading of God's judgments.

An honor–shame riposte usually contains three movements: claim, challenge, riposte. In this scene, the Pharisee has made claims about his faction and a counterclaim against the toll collector and his group. The toll collector challenges the claim not by rebutting it but by conceding it and throwing himself on God's mercy. According to the Pharisee and the Temple, that path is, by definition, closed to the toll collector, who is unclean beyond recognition and compromised beyond the reach of the redemptive media. Therefore, the toll collector's concession should have

ended the confrontation, but it escalates it instead. By his bold and audacious prayer, the toll collector challenges the claim of the Pharisee, the Temple, and the redemptive media and claims God's ear for himself. Jesus' final comment, "this man went down to his home justified" (v. 14a), represents the riposte, and it unleashes a barrage of questions. On what basis? By whose word? How could God speak outside of official channels? If the toll collector is justified by a mercy as unpredictable and outrageous as this, then who could not be included? And if toll collectors and sinners are justified in the very precincts of the Temple itself, then how is one to evaluate a Temple priesthood and its scribes who declare that nothing of the kind is possible?

If this interpretation of the parable can be argued, then one can glimpse why Jesus was stigmatized as a friend of toll collectors and sinners and why he was eventually crucified by Jerusalem elites with the assistance of Roman provincial officials. His pedagogy of the oppressed was designed to enable peasants to demystify the Temple and the role of the redemptive media and, more specifically, the name-calling of Pharisaic rule-enforcers and moral entrepreneurs, so that the peasants could name oppression as a prelude to renaming their world. In the process, the parable provided a model of a figure who refused to be silenced but found his voice in the process of discovering God.

11

The Moral Economy of the Peasant

The Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8)

C. H. Dodd's contention (1935, 21) that the cumulative details of the parables provide "a singularly complete and convincing picture" of small-town provincial life and a "more complete picture of *petit bourgeois* and peasant life than we have for any other province of the Roman Empire except Egypt" is nowhere better illustrated than by the parable of the friend at midnight. Found only in Luke 11:5–8, the parable has been interpreted in light of its Lukan context where it is sandwiched between the Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer (11:1–4) and a collection of sayings regarding prayer (11:9–13). Scholars have consistently viewed this parable as a doublet of the parable studied in chapter 12, the parable of the unjust judge (18:1–8), because both evidently deal with the same theme, persistent prayer. The pairing of these parables has exercised its own influence on the reading of the parable of the friend at midnight. This chapter examines the parable as an example of "the moral economy of the peasant" (cf. Scott 1976, 1–55), which Jesus identified as one place where the values of the reign of God could be found.

The Lukan Reading of the Parable

The Lukan reading of the parable can be inferred from the context in which Luke placed it. The parable seems to function as a midrash on 11:3, “the bread of subsistence, keep giving us daily” (author’s translation, cf. Fitzmyer 1985, 896, 900–906). This may explain in part why Luke interprets the troublesome word *anaideian* to mean “importunity” or “persistence.” He applies it to the neighbor asking for help. Although A. T. Cadoux (1931, 35) worried that this reading cast God as a “churlish man ignominiously bullied out of bed,” he attributed this somewhat scandalous way of portraying God to Luke’s unrefined Gentile proclivities. If this way of reading Luke is accurate, then the meaning of the parable is clear: it does indeed teach “the need of persistent prayer” (Oesterley 1936, 225) by arguing from the lesser to the greater. If a reluctant neighbor will arise against his better instincts and offer aid from motives no nobler than “self-interest” (Smith 1937, 148), then how much more will God respond to our prayers? In this case, the parable did not seriously intend to portray God as a sluggish neighbor but, by portraying the sleeping neighbor’s reluctance, sought to make its case by citing an extreme example. The sleeping neighbor is something like a limiting case from which to make the comparison. The decision to interpret the sleeping neighbor as an analogue for the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8) tended to highlight the neighbor’s reluctance to arise and offer aid (Smith 1937, 32; Manson 1949, 267; Jeremias 1963, 157; Marshall 1978, 462; et al.).

To the degree that the sleeping neighbor was paired with the judge, his excuses (11:7) were taken to be part of the dialogue of the parable (Catchpole 1983, 411–13). The neighbor aroused from sleep really did, at first, refuse his neighbor’s request, until his neighbor’s vexatious pestering finally convinced him that further resistance was useless. It was easy to explain why the sleeping man would be hesitant to respond, thereby calling forth his neighbor’s shameless persistence (Oesterley 1936, 222; Smith 1937, 147; Levison 1925, 458). Usually cited were the close sleeping arrangements characteristic of one-room peasant homes. Pheme Perkins (1981, 194) even detected a trace of sarcasm in the parable that smacked of an earthy folk wisdom: maybe friendship will not motivate your neighbor to get up and get what you need, but a little “persistent inconvenience will.”

For all the apparent difficulties offered by the parable, interpreters have been able to move with relative ease from its cameo of village life to larger theological themes. Although some have noted a contradiction between the

parable and Matt. 6:5–8, T. W. Manson (1949, 267) thought the contradiction more apparent than real. The parable teaches that petitioners may speak freely with a God who is more like a father and a "perfect friend ready to supply all your needs" than like a government bureaucracy, where one has to "apply on the printed form and sign on the dotted line" to ensure a mechanical delivery of goods or services. Joseph Fitzmyer (1985, 910) was equally convinced that the parable teaches the distinctive Lukan theme, persistence in prayer, but believed "it may be . . . a mistake to press the parable too much and to ask what sort of picture of God it conveys." The clearest way to obviate this problem is to read the parable in light of the sayings that follow it. Typical in this regard is John Donahue's (1988, 185) reading. The "shameless boldness" of the petitioner in approaching his neighbor reflects the boldness with which Christians can approach God in asking for the Holy Spirit. By reading the parable in this manner, the ambiguity of the parable's picture of God is qualified by the clearer image of the generous "heavenly Father" in 11:13.

The grammar of the parable offers another clue to its meaning, although this clue also is a bit ambiguous. If vv. 5–7 constitute one continuous rhetorical question requiring a strongly negative answer, then the status of the sleeping neighbor as a limiting case is clearer: because no one could imagine a neighbor responding in such a shameful and reluctant fashion, how much less would God delay in meeting the requirements of honor. Fitzmyer (1985, 911) identifies the grammatical difficulty involved in reading v. 7 as a continuation of the rhetorical question begun in vv. 5–6. Yet understanding v. 7 is crucial to interpreting the parable, because if the excuses enumerated there are part of the rhetorical question, then they are hypothetical, nothing more than "an amusing sequel" in which "Jesus suggests what response could not possibly be expected" (Derrett 1978, 822). In contrast, if they are meant to summarize the "actual" excuses ("I cannot" means "I will not"; Jeremias 1963, 158) spoken by the sleeping villager in response to his neighbor's first appeal for help, then they cannot be part of a rhetorical question that assumes it would be virtually impossible to conceive and shameful to utter such pretexts for inaction. Luke, at least, seems to take the excuses mentioned in v. 7 as the response that calls forth the shameless importunity of the desperate neighbor. This move is required by Luke's understanding of *anaideian*, which he applies to the petitioner, probably under the influence of his assimilation of the

meaning of this parable to the parable of the unjust judge, or as it might more appropriately be called by Luke, the parable of the importunate widow (Luke 18:1–8; see Catchpole 1983, 411–13.)

The Lukan emphasis is further confirmed by examining the sayings that follow the parable (11:9–13). The first saying (11:9–10) elaborates the theme of importunity or persistence in prayer. With the exception of the third phrase in each sequence ("knock, and it will be opened to you . . . and to the one who knocks . . ."), the sayings illustrate the parable. As many commentators have noted, no villager would knock on his neighbor's door (only a stranger would do that); rather, he would call out so that his sleeping neighbor would recognize his voice (Huffard 1978, 156). The second saying (vv. 11–12) is another long, rhetorical question expecting a strongly negative reply; clearly, it repeats the form of the parable. The final saying, like the parable, argues from the lesser (vv. 11–12) to the greater (v. 13), but in this case it draws the conclusion implied by the immediately preceding sayings. In rhetoric and theme, the sayings fit the parable as Luke construes it.

The Parable of Jesus

Rudolf Bultmann (1963, 174–75) judged that the original meaning of this parable, like that of many other similitudes, had become "irrecoverable" even though its general intent was clear. It was "originally an exhortation to prayer: but to what specific petition? to prayer for the coming of God's reign?" Although Dodd (1935, 19) did not attend to the parable of the importunate friend in any detail, he did think that its intent was to depict a "sudden crisis of need, calling for urgency which would otherwise be untimely and even impertinent." From this brief description, it is possible to infer that Dodd might have read this parable as a variant of a "parable of crisis," depicting a response to the Parousia of the Lord. Caught unprepared by the arrival of his guest, the host must apply to his neighbors for support and assistance, and his importunate requests reveal that he understands the urgency of the moment.

Earlier, Cadoux (1931, 153–54) interpreted the parable as Jesus' response both to charges that his public work was dividing the nation and to his subsequent rejection of appeals to "compromise for the sake of unity." Jesus could not compromise but continued his importunity on behalf of others,

especially the Gentiles. Cadoux speculated that the parable may even refer to Jesus' efforts to restore the "right use of the court of the gentiles" in the Temple, in which case the parable can be related to the cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15–17 and pars.). Jesus' parable and parabolic action in the Temple, then, were part of his efforts to "ease the way for Israel's recognition of a religious duty to the gentiles." Jesus used the parables in his war of words with his opponents in their struggle for "the soul of his people."

The difficulty with both Cadoux's and Dodd's attempts to place the parable in the setting of Jesus' public work is that neither one takes seriously the village setting of the parable, and both remain unduly influenced by the parable's Lukan setting. Joachim Jeremias (1963, 157–60) saw this problem and attempted to solve it by severing the tie between the "secondary" Lukan context and his own recontextualization of the parable in the ministry of Jesus. For Jeremias, the parable is rooted in the customs of hospitality, and its long rhetorical question demands a strong reply: "No one! Impossible! . . . Unthinkable! Under no circumstances!" To Palestinian peasants rooted in the values of village life, it would have been simply inconceivable that a neighbor who had been awakened to help fulfill the obligations of hospitality would try to excuse himself from helping by offering flimsy rationalizations. He would be shamed if he did so; he and his family would lose face in the village. This means that the troublesome word *anaideian* refers to the sleeping neighbor, not to the petitioner as Luke thought. The parable's message is now clear: it proclaims "the certainty that the petition will be granted" by arguing from the lesser to the greater. Like its doublet, the parable of the unjust judge, this parable "expresses the confidence that God will hear the appeal of [God's] own when they cry to [God] in their need," and given the apocalyptic expectation that surrounded Jesus' life and work, this means that the parable assured the disciples that they would be secure in the face of the coming tribulations that will mark the end of the age.

Jeremias (1963, 159–60) also discerned in the parable a variation on a folk-wisdom theme that he called "the beggar's wisdom." Though they are often "harshly repulsed at first," beggars know that "persistent appeals will open the hands of the hard-hearted." In Jeremias's view, the folk-wisdom theme reinforces the parable's basic meaning. Whether a response to apocalyptic anxiety or a reiteration of folk wisdom, the parable proclaims

“the great assurance.” Jesus promises that God will hear and respond to his disciples’ prayers as surely as a villager will arise to help his neighbor fulfill the sacred obligation of hospitality or a bothersome beggar will receive alms. In one case, it is a matter of honor; in the other, a matter of common sense.

By construing the parable in this way, Jeremias succumbed to the very temptation he sought to avoid, for his reading remains subtly anchored to Lukan moorings. By introducing an apocalyptic milieu for the parable’s great assurance, he followed Luke in assimilating the parable to its supposed counterpart in 18:1–8 where the theme of apocalyptic judgment is more visible, especially in vv. 7–8. In spite of his considerable efforts to explicate the details of village life found in the parable, he did not ground his reading in its social scene but rather in a supposed apocalyptic expectation shared by Jesus and his disciples.

More recently, Bernard Scott (1989, 88–91) tried to rectify this oversight by arguing that village life was used in the parable to “replicate a metaphorical system for the kingdom, because various aspects of that system can furnish a model for the kingdom”; In Luke 11:5–8, village is kingdom writ small and local. Accordingly, Scott (1989, 85–86) prefaced his discussion of the parable with an overview of peasant life in the village. But his reading of the parable departs from the very social setting he worked so hard to reconstruct because he was convinced that *anaideian* can be read only as “shamelessness.” It describes a man who acted not out of honor but its opposite, and it is precisely here that the metaphorical shift in the parable occurs. It is “not the gracious friend but the shameless one who furnishes the loaves.” Although this way of reading the parable is characteristic of Scott, who often looked for the breaking in of the kingdom at just those points of disjuncture with everyday life, the effect of this interpretation is to marginalize the village as a metaphorical vehicle for kingdom. Instead, the village becomes the foil against which occurs the startling metaphorical shift that reveals the kingdom.

Like Scott, John Dominic Crossan (1973, 83–84) perceived that the parable is a parable of action in which the advent of the kingdom triggers an “adequate decisional response,” which he reads rather minimally as accepting “the bothersome inevitability of what must be done.” Beyond that, Crossan is unwilling to go.

Village Scene and Social Scripts

Through the years, commentators have devoted a great deal of energy to explicating the details of village life assumed in the parable. In the course of their deliberations, they have debated nearly every detail contained in the parable or implied by it.

The Details of Village Life

The arrival of an unexpected guest in the middle of the night has been attributed to the custom of traveling at night to avoid the intense heat of the day (Oesterley 1936, 221). Offering a more geographically differentiated view, however, Kenneth Bailey (1976, 121) argues that night travel was customary only "in the desert areas of Syria, Jordan and Egypt" but not in Palestine and Lebanon, where travelers could count on sea breezes from the Mediterranean and elevated terrain to moderate temperatures.

There is also some disagreement about how often bread was baked, what size the loaves were, and who baked it. N. Levison (1925, 457) believes that each peasant family baked bread every Friday before Sabbath and then as often as needed during the week. Because no peasant family could afford to bake new bread until the old bread ran out, they would not bake bread on a regular schedule. W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 221) agrees, adding that the supply of bread was kept in a basket until the supply ran low and it was time to bake another batch. To this custom he traces a Jewish proverb, "Better bread in a basket than no bread in a basket." Jeremias (1963, 157) thinks that the wife of each family baked each day's supply of bread before sunrise. But Bailey (1976, 122) is convinced that the Palestinian peasants baked bread for the week, not by the day, and that the women of the village cooperated by using a community oven on some kind of rotating schedule (see also Huffard 1978, 157). If this was the case, then everyone would know who had freshly baked bread.

Opinion also varies about the kind of loaves baked. Were they the small rolls or pita bread-sized loaves, three of which were considered adequate for a meal (Jeremias 1963, 157)? Or were they larger loaves, one of which would be more than enough for a guest (Bailey 1976, 122)? E. W. Huffard (1978, 158) believes that the loaves were the small kind, two of which would constitute a normal meal, and because, as an obligation of hospitality, the host had to place before his guest more than he or she could

possibly eat, he requested “three loaves” from his sleeping neighbor. It would have been an unthinkable insult to offer a guest either old bread or a partly used loaf. Only freshly baked bread would do.

The Value and Customs of Hospitality

Interpreters are as clear about the conventions of hospitality that govern the scene in the parable as they are confused about the parable’s specific details. Although the guest has arrived in the middle of the night, the host has an obligation to set before his guest a meal appropriate for the occasion, an auspicious meal for a propitious occasion. In the tradition of the magnanimous host, he must provide more than his guest can possibly eat. The hour of the night is irrelevant; the host must serve a meal, and the guest is equally obligated to eat one. Nothing less will satisfy the demands of the situation.

In his efforts to meet this obligation, the host can freely call on the resources of the village because hospitality is a requirement of the entire village, not just of the family in whose house the guest is to stay. The honor of the village is at stake, and for this reason, the host has gone first to get bread from the household whose bread is freshest. Either he or his wife will call on other households to provide other elements for the meal, including the best crockery and serving dishes. Because bread is the utensil by which the meal is served, it must be procured first. Typically, food is served in common dishes. Each diner is given two or three loaves of bread. The guest breaks off a piece of bread, dips it into a common dish or scoops food with it, eats it, and repeats the process. In this manner, the common dishes remain undefiled. In the poorest of villages, none of whose residents could contribute to a meal for a guest, the host would provide salt in which the bread could be dipped (Bailey 1976, 120–23; Jeremias 1963, 157–59; Huffard 1978, 157–59).

It is important to emphasize that the unexpected guest is considered the guest of the entire village. Therefore, everyone in the village is bound to uphold the village’s honor by contributing to the meal. When the host declares, “I have nothing to set before [my guest],” he means, “I have nothing adequate to serve my guest that will uphold the honor of the village” (Bailey 1976, 123). Because peasants stored many of their food

supplies in their houses, the host would know who had olives, cheese, grape molasses, and whatever else could be gathered to offer his guest. In this setting, the assumption that the host is simply borrowing bread that he will readily return is questionable (see Jeremias 1963, 157; Levison 1925, 457). The contributions to the meal are not loans but direct gifts, provided to fulfill the ritual obligations of the village and maintain its reputation. In this context, J. D. M. Derrett (1978, 83–84) notes that the request for help is direct, without the "pleases" or "thank-yous" that would indicate social distance and insincerity. "It is proof of friendship to ask as if the thing requested were the property of the asker." Bailey (1976, 123) cites three reasons why it is assumed that the sleeping neighbor will rise and respond to his friend's appeal: first, his friend asks as a host, not as a beggar; second, he is inviting his friend to help him honor another friend; and finally, his request is humble. He asks for nothing more than bread, the staple of subsistence.

One must remember that, in a small village setting, the midnight cry for help is not exactly a private conversation. The host is under urgent obligation, and he cannot delay in providing for his guest. So he cries out to his sleeping friend to wake and tells him the exciting news. In waking his friend, he is also alerting the other villagers to his needs, and they are doubtless already rising in the anticipation that they too will be solicited for help. Indeed, it is an honor, not an annoyance, to be asked to contribute to an occasion that maintains the honor of the village; in doing so, the participants enhance the reputations of their families. If the sleeping neighbor were to mumble something like the pathetic excuses cited in the parable (11:7), he would disgrace himself and shame his family before the whole village (Huffard 1978, 158–60; Bailey 1976, 122–24). To do so would be to risk ostracism or other equally unpleasant consequences.

If this is the appropriate setting, then the sleeping neighbor is not being irritated by his neighbor but is being honored by being asked to contribute to the meal. His eager response would set the tone for the village by demonstrating the ready quality of the village's hospitality. In light of these values, it is difficult not to read Crossan's notion (1973, 84) about accepting the "bothersome inevitability of what must be done" and Perkins's suggestion (1981, 194) about the effects of "persistent inconvenience" as anachronistic.

Against this backdrop of cultural values and village life, the parable reads as a rhetorical question whose excuses for refusing to help (11:7) are not meant to be taken as live possibilities but as impossibilities. It matters little whether the peasant family slept with the children in the middle and the parents on the ends (Smith 1937, 147) or with the parents in the middle, the younger children next to them, and the older children around the edges of the common room (Levison 1925, 458). A father roused from sleep and asked to uphold the honor of the village, which includes his family, would answer the call, whether he woke in the dark and fumbled his way to the door, possibly nudging a child or two along the way, or whether he made his way to the door by the light of the dimly burning lamp that vaguely illumined the peasant household (Jeremias 1963, 157). The point is that he would make his way to the door and respond, because the stakes were too high not to help his friend, his neighbor who had become a host. Even if the closed door of a peasant household signified that the family had withdrawn from work and social intercourse with the village, it did not pose an insurmountable barrier to the demands of hospitality, which were great enough to unbolt any door of any village house at any hour. Bolted doors and sleeping children were minor obstacles easily overcome (Smith 1937, 147; Jeremias 1963, 157–58; Bailey 1976, 121).

The Crux of the Matter: *anaideian*

After the background of the parable has been investigated in all its cultural detail, the problem of interpreting the critical word *anaideian* remains. In spite of Derrett's contention (1978, 84) that the word's meaning had shifted from an "invariably pejorative" to a "neutral position, meaning 'boldly', 'unselfconsciously,' " the preponderance of the evidence suggests otherwise (see Moulton and Milligan 1930, 33; Liddell and Scott 1940, 105; BAGD 54; but note evidence cited by Derrett [1978, 84n1]). It seems likely that the meaning of *anaideian* remained consistently censorious from the classical through the Hellenistic and early church periods. It means "shamelessness" or, more generally, "impudence." The obvious problem with this reading is that it does not fit easily into a reading of the parable. Therefore, the early church assimilated the meaning of the term, along with the parable, to Luke 18:1–8 and either rendered *anaideian* as "importunity" or tried to retain the scent of its scandalous past by translating it as

“shameless boldness” (for example, Donahue 1988, 185) or “boldly, unselfconsciously” (Derrett 1978, 84). In each case, following Luke, the interpreters assigned *anaideian* to the neighbor seeking help.

However, this interpretation did raise a theological problem that prompted Levison (1925, 460) to offer an unusual proposal. He argued that the term described the sleeping neighbor, not the neighbor seeking help, because if it were to apply to the latter, it would lead to the view that prayer was nothing more than badgering God into submission. To combat this view and its unacceptable implications, Levison proposed that the word could be translated as “strengthen.” The parable promised that God would come to our aid in time of need and strengthen us. Although this sleight of hand solved his theological problem, it did not solve the more basic lexical issue, and his suggestion has attracted little attention.

The most extensive effort to cut the Gordian knot has come from Bailey (1976, 125–33, esp., 131–33), who argues that *anaideian* derives from *aidōs* plus the alpha privative. Because *aidōs* can carry either a positive meaning (having an appropriate sense of shame, honor, self-respect) or a negative one (being shameful, scandalous), the reader must let the context determine which meaning is being invoked. In this parable, Bailey believes that the negative meaning (shameful) is implied and then negated by the alpha privative. This transforms the meaning of *anaideian* into “the avoidance of shame.” The great value of Bailey’s etymology is that it renders the meaning of *anaideian* in terms that fit the apparent cultural context of the parable. But if *aidōs* can also mean “having a sense of shame” or being honorable, then why would Luke or an earlier hand add an alpha privative and convert *aidōs* into *anaideian*, a word whose range of meanings is more limited and whose presence confuses the meaning of the parable? Why did not Luke let the reader infer from the context of the story which meaning of *aidōs* was being employed? Clearly, the issue is not settled.

The Moral Economy of the Peasant and the Reign of God

The first issue that needs to be addressed is what kind of village is depicted in the parable of the friend at midnight. For the purposes of this reading, the setting is taken to be what Shimon Appelbaum (1977, 363)

called a “nucleated village” located in the midst of the fields, which included the individual peasants’ smallholdings and common land that belonged to the village. It is also quite possible that the village was located adjacent to the lands of the large estates scattered throughout Judaea and Galilee, which were encroaching on the domain of the village. Nucleated villages were usually located near larger market towns, to which they were attached “administratively or tenurially,” and were built around a village well and oven. In his study of human territoriality, Robert Sack (1986, 61 fig. 3.2, 71 fig. 3.4a and d) has provided two schematic ways of representing such villages and their “reciprocal circulation of resources and products.”

The Limited Good Society

The life of peasant villagers was dominated by their endless drive to secure a reliable subsistence. This task was reinforced by “the image of limited good” that dominated peasant society. The image of limited good (Foster 1967, 300–323, esp. 304–5) means that peasants were keenly aware that “all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness, honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety” always existed in limited quantity and were perennially in short supply. Because peasants could do little or nothing to alter their situation, they adapted their lives and coping strategies to this overwhelming reality. The primary implication drawn by peasants living in a limited good society was that “an individual or a family can improve [themselves] only at the expense of others” in the village. Therefore, any individual’s gain was perceived as a threat to the entire village unless that gain was used for the poor or the common welfare of the village, and even then, the benefactor would be viewed with suspicion. It was far better to ensure one’s subsistence, pay the required rents and tributes, reserve some seed for planting and fodder for the animals, and place the remainder in a ceremonial fund to be shared with the village as the situation required. The peasant’s goal was to remain within the profile of village expectations, not to stand out from them.

The Moral Economy of the Peasant

The value system underlying this limited good society was what Scott (1976, 1–55) has called “the moral economy of the peasant.” It was rooted in the peasants’ belief that they had a moral right to a guaranteed subsistence. The primordial need of peasant cultivators was a reliable subsistence, and they would evaluate the patterns of exploitation impressed on them by whether or not they provided this guarantee. As Scott (1976, 7) puts it, the peasants’ criterion was not “how much was taken” but rather “what is left.” More to the point, they would judge any system of extraction by how well it provided for them when their crops failed or when they faced some other disaster. To be insured against such vagaries, peasants would accept severe forms of exploitation. Their behavior was driven by a “safety first” principle that drew “a defensive perimeter around subsistence routines” (Scott 1976, 15–22). Although their behavior may seem irrational to an outsider, it makes sense within the moral economy dictated by their social and economic situation. In effect, they were spreading or dispersing the risk of a catastrophic failure that could ruin them by accepting forms of exploitation, however brutal they may have appeared, that ensured their basic right to a guaranteed subsistence.

In return for their exploitation, peasants expected elites “to provide for the subsistence needs of the poor in time of dearth” and to abrogate any claims to their basic subsistence reserve. The claims of landlord, moneylender, or state would be judged unjust and invalid whenever they required peasants to expend their subsistence reserves to meet their obligations, because the right to this subsistence was a moral claim that transcended the needs of elites for exploitation. Behind this system of expectations lies an implicit appeal to a minimal form of patronage and a claim to a minimal form of client benefits. Elites were morally required to act as patrons to the degree that they drew the line limiting their exploitation at the boundary where the subsistence reserve of the peasants began.

The more unbalanced the power relations between landowners and peasants, the less effective the peasants would be in pressing their moral claims. This is why the village was the location of a second important component in the moral economy of the peasant, the norm of reciprocity, which was the primary form of risk insurance associated with the village. Reciprocity meant that every peasant family was guaranteed a minimal subsistence from the resources of the village and could press a claim to the

village's resources to the degree that its reserves could cover those needs. This expectation governed family relations in the village and provided "something of a living normative model of equity and justice," a summary of the peasants' view of "decent social relations" (Scott 1976, 41). The norm of reciprocity also governed relations between peasant families. If a village neighbor asked for help, one always agreed to help because, by doing so, one obligated the neighbor to reciprocate when the situation was reversed. When any family's subsistence was in jeopardy, it could stake a claim to the resources of the village.

The importance of this claim can hardly be overstated during a period when elites were becoming more predatory toward peasants and effecting changes in the social stratification of rural life in Palestine by forcing more and more smallholders into increasing forms of dependency as tenants and day laborers. As Scott (1976, 35–40) notes, the conventional hierarchy in most peasant societies was smallholder, tenant, and wage laborer. The status of smallholder was valued most because it provided the most subsistence security. Once again, it was not title to the land that mattered as much as secure and protected access to it. When combined with the supportive structures of the village, smallholding represented the best chance of survival. When peasants slipped into tenancy, they lost the security of the land and the safety net provided by the village, becoming more directly dependent on a landlord to whom they were contractually indebted. When those relations deteriorated, the tenant was further degraded into the status of wage laborer or day laborer.

It was usually at just those moments when peasants were in danger of losing their status and falling to the next, lower state of dependency (from smallholder to tenant or from tenant to day laborer) that they resisted most strongly. Each drop in status also entailed a "sharp drop in security." A peasant who lost his smallholding had lost a form of "crisis security," because he could no longer count on the assistance of a landlord or the reciprocity of the village. As a tenant, the peasant was totally dependent on his relationship with an elite who would attempt to minimize the patron-client relationship in favor of a contractual one that supplied no risk insurance and might even shift the risk to the tenant. Scott (1976, 36–41) speaks of each step in the decline of the downwardly mobile peasant as crossing a threshold. The most "ferocious resistance" would occur "when subsistence guarantees within dependence collapse." The violence that

erupts in the parable of the tenants (Mark 12:1–12 and pars.) may have its source in the degradation of smallholders to the status of tenants. The local peasant revolt that the parable depicts, like most peasant uprisings, was most often initiated to restore a lost status rather than to change the social order (Mark 12:7; see chapter 6). Once peasants had fallen into the category of day laborers, their protests were more ineffectual because their bargaining power had been virtually destroyed (see chapter 5 and Matt. 20:1–16, esp. vv. 11–15).

The peasant village in Palestine during the early decades of the first century was under increasing stress. The cumulative effects of Herodian rule combined with the rigors of Roman colonialism and the demands of the Temple hierarchy had taken their toll. The monetization and commercialization of the local economy had led to increasingly predatory relationships between elites and peasants. Although there is little or no evidence for the conversion of land, on the Roman model, to latifundia worked by slave laborers, there is evidence for rising debt and defaults on loans, accompanied by the hostile takeover of peasant smallholdings and the reduction of peasants to more dependent economic statuses. These practices traced to the fact that elites made loans to peasants and held their land as collateral. Martin Goodman (1982, 421–22) suggests that the *prosbul* was instituted because creditors and debtors "lacked social ties to bind them." The *prosbul* essentially guaranteed creditors the right to exact payment from debtors on demand. As the social relationship changed, creditors demanded the right to "exact payment of a debt with the backing of the courts even after the universal cancellation of debts at the end of the seven year cycle." The *prosbul*, which ensured this right, sounded the death knell of the sabbatical provisions in the Torah. The *prosbul* emerged at a time when the relationship between elites and peasants was becoming commercialized, in no small part because of the influence of the Roman colonial presence. Two of the more obvious results of the *prosbul* were the alienation of land from peasants and their subsequent degradation into more servile roles as tenants or day laborers.

These strains led to the development of compensatory strategies by peasants. To stave off their seemingly inevitable losses, peasants sought security in a variety of ways. They reduced their consumption of food or ate poorer foods, began self-help crafts and trades to augment income, sought to strengthen kinship ties and village friendships, or began the cultivation of

ties to a powerful patron (Scott 1976, 26). It did no good to appeal to the state in its local, colonial, royal, or hieratic forms, and each step out of the immediate family increased the social distance between the parties and decreased the reliability of the aid. The closer the source of aid was to peasant, the poorer it was and therefore the less likely to provide actual help. This was the catch-22 in which peasants were trapped.

What has all of this to do with the parable? These trends most likely had their effects on village life by increasing stress on each family and thereby the strains between families. As goods became more limited, the scarcity challenged the value of hospitality. How could a peasant eke out a subsistence, provide fodder for his animals, set aside seeds for the next planting, keep a minimum for barter or trade, pay rents and tributes, and still maintain a ceremonial fund? Every occasion of hospitality threatened to drive the peasant over the edge of survival. Yet in the village depicted in the parable, the villagers rise to the occasion and provide hospitality for their unexpected guest. “Where are the values of the reign of heaven to be found?” Jesus asks. The answer lies in the extravagant hospitality of the village and in the code of honor that sustains it.

The Theme of Friendship and Kinship

The increasingly stressful economic situation does make the theme of “friendship” more understandable. The word “friend” (*philos*) is repeated three times at the beginning of the parable. Derrett (1982, 33) thinks the “friend/brother” distinction is important. Friends and relatives do share one thing in common: they are the “two classes on whom he [the peasant] relies for cooperation.” There are also important distinctions between them. Because relations with relatives were often marked by rivalry and mutual obligation, friends became an important outlet for the expression of one’s emotional life. A friend may be more useful than a brother because the relationship is voluntary: “We are fixed by fate with our brothers—this limits their concern for us—whereas our friends’ self-respect depends upon their cooperation, which is reciprocal” (Derrett 1978, 81). What bound friends together was their mutual concern for each other’s honor, and because honor was the highest value, a friend would supply whatever was

needed to uphold the honor of a friend. “It is clear a friend would refuse nothing that is asked in appropriate circumstances.”

The desperate neighbor may have turned to his friend either because he had no immediate family in the village on whom he could count for help or because they did not have what he needed. This would explain the abrupt request, “Lend me three loaves.” The directness of the request implies closeness, not rudeness, as Derrett has observed (1978, 83–84). The use of “lend” does not mean that he will “pay him back” with three loaves as soon as he can bake the next batch of bread but rather acknowledges the mutuality involved in their friendship. Every request implies the willingness to reciprocate. For the purposes of this reading, the distinction between relative and friend is an example of the distinction between kinship and fictive kinship. The host turns first to a member of his fictive kinship group, a friend, for bread, and the friend responds like one of the family.

The Jesus movement seems to have established a fictive kinship network. Jesus’ response to his mother and brothers (Mark 3:31–34) appeals to just such a larger family, in which “the one who does the will of God” is considered a member of the fictive kinship network being formed by Jesus. When Peter boldly asserts, “We have left everything and followed you,” Jesus reminds him that his loss of family and kinship group has been replaced by another fictive kinship group with mothers, brothers, sisters, and houses “a hundredfold” greater “now in this age” than what he has left behind (Mark 10:28–31). The emergence of a fictive kinship group such as the Jesus movement could be seen as a response to the economic pressures already noted. Peasant families were usually broken up because only one son could inherit the smallholding. Other sons had to find work on the open market as wage laborers and live as best they could. Daughters were married or sent away to find work wherever they could, often as prostitutes or virtual slaves in the households of the wealthy. Village kinship networks could not absorb the number of children. Nor could the village take care of all of its own offspring. Its resources also were strained to the breaking point. In this setting, a fictive kinship group broadened the network of support on which people could rely and accommodated a relationship between itinerancy and settled villages. Gerd Theissen (1978) glimpsed the importance of fictive kinship networks, although he set them in the context of itinerant radicalism in the postresurrection period.

It is at this point that the parable poses such difficulty. The sleeping neighbor is not motivated by the bond of friendship but by his *anaideian*. If Bailey is right, then the parable coheres; it is the neighbor's adherence to the code of honor and his desire to avoid shaming himself, his family, and his village that motivates him to "get up and give him whatever he needs." In the hierarchy of values, even friendship is subservient to honor and shame, and given the supreme importance attached to honor, this reading of the parable makes sense. But as David Catchpole (1983, 413) has noted, this yields a trivial result: "It merely affirms what is scarcely riveting or revolutionary, namely that a request for help in observing the hospitality conventions will certainly be met on the basis of friendship." Even if Catchpole is wrong in assuming that every parable has a revolutionary or world-shattering meaning (cf. also Crossan 1973; Scott 1989), his argument is still well taken. Why would Jesus simply state the obvious?

The Stranger and the Sojourner

There are other resonances in the parable. The unexpected guest has arrived from a journey, *paregeneto ex hodou*, which can be more simply translated "appeared off the road." Derrett (1978, 82) realized that the unexpected guest has two claims on the villager: he is his friend and he is a sojourner, "for all who are 'from the road' are entitled to care and lodging." The unexpected guest may not be a traveler from distant parts whose arrival is a grand occasion for the village but a friend of one of the villagers (11:6a) "on the road" and unable to reach his village for any number of reasons. If the village depicted in the parable is a nucleated village, as mentioned earlier, then it is likely that the traveler is neither from a great distance nor of high social status. If this is the case, then the arguments about the scope of hospitality necessary for such an auspicious occasion are suspect.

It is even possible that the night traveler is an itinerant teacher, like Jesus, who has left his home and wanders among the villages, coming "off the road" from time to time for food and shelter. If the Jesus movement had established patterns of itinerancy among the villages of Galilee and Judaea and relied on the local communities for support, food, and shelter, as several passages from the gospel traditions suggest (cf. Matt. 10:5–23; Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–16; Mark 6:6b–13), then the parable portrays the hospitable reception accorded one such itinerant for the reign of God.

> Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. (Matt. 10:11–14)

Theissen (1978) has already argued that, during the postresurrection period, the earliest Jesus movement in Palestine relied on a symbiotic relationship between itinerant radicals and settled communities. Read in this context, the parable of the friend at midnight intimates that the network of mutuality was being constructed as part of Jesus' earlier public activity. The parable portrays the reception given an itinerant disciple by a sympathetic village.

Because the Jesus movement existed at the margins of society, and because itinerancy was in itself suspect if not deviant behavior, the unexpected guest of the parable is more like a sojourner and resident alien in the land than like a native. His reception is therefore in the tradition of the Torah, which counsels hospitality toward strangers and sojourners. The Holiness Code of Leviticus states simply, "You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (19:34; cf. Deut. 10:17–19). Exodus 22:21 grounds the treatment of strangers in the people's experience of oppression in Egypt—"You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt"—and Yahweh promises to hear and heed the cry of resident aliens who are oppressed as surely as Yahweh heard the cry of the people in Egypt (Exod. 22:22–24). The fallen grapes of the vineyards (Lev. 19:10) and the crops of the field are not to be gleaned but left for the stranger and the poor. According to Deuteronomy (14:28–29; 24:17–22; 26:1–15; 27:19), the third-year tithe and other provisions of justice are explicitly for the support of the Levites, widows, orphans, and resident aliens. If the hospitable and generous treatment of the unexpected guest in the parable can be interpreted within this framework, then the villagers are living out of the "debt codes" of the Torah, for it is the debt codes that command consideration for the stranger and sojourner (see Belo 1981, 37–59).

How, then, do the themes of "friendship" and "strangers and sojourners" fit together in the parable? Because friendship is not a major theme of the Hebrew Bible, Scott (1989, 90–91) thinks that friendship is assimilated into

the theme of the neighbor. That may be, but there is another way to examine the matter. The rhetoric of friendship can be assimilated to the institution of clientelism (or patron-client relations). In this setting, friendship accentuates the personal nature of the relationship by masking its dependent and utilitarian elements. In an economy in which peasants were being increasingly threatened, they could attempt to alleviate the pressure by seeking a "friendship" with a powerful patron. But patron-client loyalties were notoriously unstable, liable to change at any moment, and they were difficult to form when power relations between elites and peasants had become so asymmetrical that elites had neither need nor practical reason for gathering peasant clients. In this situation, the rhetoric of friendship was exposed for what it was, a way of mystifying power relations (see Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984, 1–18, 269–93; Elliott 1987; Malina 1988; Schmidt, Guasti, Lande, and Scott, eds., 1977). When placed in this environment, friendship was nothing more than a convenience to be employed as long as it suited the needs of elites to accumulate power and influence, and as long as it served these purposes, it permitted some small redistribution of wealth to clients.

But friendship could also be assimilated with Abraham and the tradition of hospitality associated with his name. Although a minor theme in the Hebrew Bible, as Scott noted, friendship played an important role in traditions about Abraham and his steward Eleazar (Derrett 1970b, 86–89; see above, chapter 7). Abraham's hospitality (Gen 18:121) is contrasted with the inhospitable reception given the angels by the inhabitants of Sodom (Gen. 19:1–14), a precedent for the importance of practicing hospitality that was cited by the author of Hebrews (13:2). Jesus associates the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah with the judgment that will fall on the towns and villages that refuse hospitality to his itinerant disciples (Matt. 10:14–15; parallel, Luke 10:10–12). By contrast, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are envisioned as hosts of the messianic banquet (Matt. 8:11–12; parallel, Luke 13:28–30), and Abraham's bosom is the place where Lazarus finally receives the hospitable care he was refused at the rich man's gate (Luke 16:19–31). As a model of the honorable man, Abraham's hospitality became a value to emulate.

Indeed, Abraham became a model of another kind of patron, a generous patron. As Derrett (1970b, 86) notes, "Abraham . . . is the father of the Jewish people, but is also their patron." It is this kind of patronage that is

written into the debt codes of the Torah cited by Fernando Belo (1981, 37–59) and that is found in the material above on the sojourner and stranger. In a relationship unlike the shifting alliances that mark the patron-client networks of the elites and their dependents, the villagers who offer hospitality participate in an enduring allegiance to Abraham. By their actions, they show themselves to be the true descendents of Abraham, in contrast to the status-conscious Jewish elites who trace their lineage to him and claim him as their patron. The villagers' sense of honor is not confined to expedient loyalties dictated by economic and political necessity but is rooted in the model set by Abraham and articulated in the debt codes of the Torah.

Every time the villagers receive an itinerant disciple or a friend of another villager, they participate in the hospitality of Abraham, and every time they place their meager resources at the disposal of the village, they participate in some small way in the continual redistribution of wealth for the sake of protecting and caring for the vulnerable, as envisioned in the Torah. When the village responds as the villager in the parable, the villagers are emulating their true patron and, in doing so, receive his commendation, for as James 2:23 says, Abraham "was called the friend of God."

Shameless Hospitality

How would this behavior be viewed by outsiders? At this point, the discussion of the meaning of the parable turns again to *anaideian*. At the outset of this brief inquiry, it needs to be said that, like every other discussion of *anaideian*, this study too leaves its share of loose ends but will, it is hoped, contribute to the ongoing and unfinished discussion. Although the consensus of the commentators on this parable agrees that *anaideian* and its related forms consistently refer to negative characteristics, these commentators do not examine the qualities to determine whether or not they fit into larger categories. (For a summary of the appearances of *anaideian* and related forms, see Johnson 1979, 125–28.) This study proposes that the instances of *anaideian* and its related forms fit into two major categories.

First, in several instances the word seems to refer to greed. In the LXX, this meaning is found in 1 Sam. 2:29, where the sons of Eli greedily reserve the choicest portions of the offerings for themselves; in Sir. 23:6, in the

prayer of the wicked man to be saved from excess (greed, lust, and shameless passion); and in Isa. 56:11, in the insatiable appetites of the "dogs" who have devoured Israel. J. L. Moulton and G. Milligan (1930, 33) include references to papyri where the meaning is the same, one in reference to excessive levying of tribute.

Second, another cluster of meanings for *anaideian* describes attitudes that challenge socially constructed boundaries or behaviors and that break those established barriers. (For the significance of boundaries in a purity culture, see Malina 1981, chap. 6; Neyrey 1986.) Thus in the LXX, Deut. 28:50 describes a fierce nation that shows "no respect to the old or favor to the young," and Bar. 4:15 similarly portrays a "ruthless" nation with "no respect for the aged, and no pity for the child." In the domestic sphere, the word is used to describe the attitude of a daughter threatening the submissive role assigned to her (Sir. 26:10–11); the disgrace that accrues to a man whose wife supports him (Sir. 25:22), and the patricidal/regicidal scheming of Antipater against Herod, which offended "virtue" (*aretē*) and "justice" (*dikaiosunē*) alike (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.118–19). In the social sphere, it refers to the beggar who has lost his sense of shame (Sir. 40:30), to the bold face of the prostitute on the prowl (Prov. 7:10–27; cf. also 21:29), to the brazen and continual apostasy of the people of Judah (Jer. 8:4), and to the refusal to pay an obligation (Moulton and Milligan 1930, 33). In every case, the words refer to attitudes that disregard boundaries and social conventions or to behavior that violates socially and religiously sanctioned boundaries. Of course, boundaries were most often drawn by elites and reinforced through the codifying work of their retainers. Therefore, the question is: Whose boundaries are being violated and by whom?

More to the point, how can the behavior of the villager in the parable of the friend at midnight be described as shameless and boundary-breaking? By whose standards? According to whose boundaries? The answer is not hard to find. In the Palestine of Jesus' day, the Torah was the source of boundary drawing, and in the interests of protecting Jerusalem elites and the Temple hierarchy, the retainers of the elites and the Temple recodified the Torah through the oral torah so that boundaries would be drawn along "purity" lines. In this way, they subverted the debt codes of the Torah with their concern for land, redistribution of wealth, and justice. For the internal elites of Palestine, the primary value of living by the purities was that it

permitted them to pursue their acquisitive greed while remaining Torah-clean. In pursuing the acquisition of wealth at the expense of the peasants and rural poor, they mimicked the behavior of their Roman overlords. When they expended their wealth for reasons of status display or conspicuous consumption, they did so to advance their position and obligate others.

From the point of view of these urban elites, the hospitality of the villagers was shameless. It was expended on a virtual stranger and gained them nothing in return. At its best, it was little more than a poor imitation of the great banquets of the elites, staged without the means necessary to make it a truly great occasion. The villagers would have done better to save their food for hard times rather than expect their social superiors to take care of them when their subsistence failed. They were fools for expending their necessities to feed a stranger off the streets.

However, Jesus turned the dominant negative value judgment into an affirmation of village hospitality. The punch line (v. 8) is thus spoken ironically. Because “friendship” had become entangled in the webs of patron-client loyalties, it could no longer be appealed to. But boundary-breaking hospitality was something else! It was truly “shameless” in the tradition of the hospitality of Abraham and the concern for the stranger and sojourner in the Torah. Every time a village greeted a stranger or received a sojourner as a guest, they were creating a messianic banquet. It is in these meals, not in the great feasts of the elites, that the analogy to the messianic banquet is to be found. True, the peasants who inhabited these nameless villages were unclean and impure by the canons of the oral torah, and they lived at the extreme margins of that law or beyond its boundaries, but in their village code of honor and hospitality, they embodied a justice that the purities could not comprehend.

To put the matter in Freirean terms, the village peasants who offered hospitality to visitors and sojourners were engaging in limit acts that challenged the efforts of their oppressors to dehumanize them and reduce them to creatures whose lives were obsessed by the desire to survive. Rather than cave in to the desire to hoard and accumulate, the peasants continued to cooperate and to provide hospitality. In so doing, they participated in a “shameless” social order where their continual but small redistributions of wealth and food foreshadowed a different order of human relations, one molded by justice and mutual reciprocity. Their ordinary actions were no small matter.

12

Justice at the Gate?

The Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8)

The parable of the unjust judge is usually interpreted as a doublet of the parable of the importunate neighbor (Luke 11:5–8) and sometimes grouped with Luke 18:9–14, the parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector. Its theme is taken to be the importance of persistent prayer, as the Lukan introduction to the parable makes clear.

This chapter interprets the parable as exposing the conflict between the Torah as it exists ideally and the Torah as it functions in practice. In addition, this chapter focuses on the importance of the widow as an oppressed woman whose voice breaks the culture of silence in which she is immersed and forces an accommodation with the Torah as practiced by the judges of unrighteousness or injustice.

The Lukan Reading of the Parable

Three factors reveal Luke's understanding of this parable. The first is his placement of the parable toward the close of a small eschatological discourse (17:20—18:14). The second is his effort to relate this parable to two companion parables in 11:5–8 and 18:9–14 by explicitly interpreting them as related to the practice of prayer. The third is the collection of sayings that he has attached to this parable. The three factors are

intertwined, because Luke's contextualization of the parable of the unjust judge accounts in large part for his introductory framing (18:1) and the sayings (18:6–8) he has attached to the parable itself (18:2–5).

Although Joseph Fitzmyer (1985, 1176) preferred to include v. 6 with the parable, most scholars since Rudolf Bultmann (1963, 175) have regarded the phrase "and the Lord said" as an attachment formula. In this case, the first words of Jesus in v. 6b provide a smooth transition from the parable to the sayings in vv. 7–8 by suggesting that the judge's final speech (vv. 4b–5) is the parable's way of asserting what the Lord says in vv. 7–8. This connection makes sense only if Luke has identified the judge as a God figure whose words carry the burden of the parable's meaning. This identification has not been without problems. Joachim Jeremias thought that the figure of the judge was so shocking that it required the interpretation provided by the sayings in vv. 7–8. Whereas this led Jeremias (1963, 156) to argue that the entire complex of parable and sayings (vv. 2–8) came from Jesus, Eta Linnemann (1966, 121) drew exactly the opposite conclusion: the parable and sayings assume a time when the fledgling church was suffering persecution, and the parable was composed to restore faith and reassure the wavering that the Lord would justify the saints. Only after the parable was detached from this context did Luke relate it to prayer. But as I. Howard Marshall (1978, 669) and others have argued, the two themes are complementary, not contradictory. The parable intends to "induce that faith in God and His purposes of good which serve as the foundation of all real prayer" (Manson 1949, 305). In Luke's church, those divine purposes were intimately related to questions about eschatological or final purposes.

Because he reads the judge as a God figure, Luke appears to use the parable to argue from the lesser to the greater: if the judge responds to the widow, how much more will God respond to the cries and petitions of the saints. In this context, the application of the parable to prayer is, as Norman Perrin (1967, 130) notes, "natural and proper." The attached sayings (vv. 7–8a) allegorize the detail of "vindication" in the parable (Fitzmyer 1985, 1177) and exhort the church not to lose heart (v. 1) but to continue in faith-inspired prayer (v. 8b). John Donahue (1988, 180) has grouped this parable with its sequel (18:9–14) and its doublet (11:5–8) under the theme "trial by prayer." In these readings, the importance of the widow emerges as a model of the kind of persistent prayer required by the situation of the church, and

her relationship to the neighbor seeking help (11:5–8) and to the toll collector (18:9–14) is clearer.

Donahue (1988, 181) also argues that all three levels of the Synoptic tradition can be found in the parable. Jesus' parable is found in vv. 2–6, allowing for a substitution of "Lord" for "Jesus" or "he" in v. 6. Because the apocalyptic tone of vv. 7–8a does not accord with Luke's eschatological outlook, it probably traces to a source that Luke used to construct portions of the discourse that precedes the parable (17:20–37). Luke's hand can be seen in the introductory framing (v. 1) and in the conclusion (v. 8).

The theological themes and practical concerns of the Lukan material do not fit together quite as nicely as this summary suggests. While persistent prayer and the continuance of faith under persecution may be related to each other, they both raise a common question, not of eschatology but of theodicy. The theodical question is posed in v. 7 and answered in v. 8a. But the answer is problematic. A. T. Cadoux (1931, 182) saw this difficulty when he observed, "It is an evident intent of the parable to assert that God's delay is not due to callousness." God has "some good and strong reasons for delay," the parable intimates, but it does not say what they are. Cadoux attempted to deduce the missing reasons from v. 8b but managed only to infer that Jesus' coming triumph as the Son of man "would miss its best part unless it found faith on earth not merely in heaven" (1931, 183). T. W. Manson (1949, 308) found a variation of this theme, namely, that God's delay is to give Israel opportunity to repent. The many attempts to give God's "good and strong" reasons only restate the problem because they raise as many questions as they answer.

This problem is probably why Luke placed the emphasis on prayer and focused on the actions of the widow as an example for the members of his community. If this is the case, it explains the assimilation of this parable to 11:5–8, where the God figure is less scandalous but still troublesome enough to persuade Luke to shift attention to the neighbor seeking help. Marshall (1978, 669) was right to suggest that the parable counsels disciples "to pray until the *parousia* and not give up hope." Even if the community cannot discern God's reasons, they can still pray. In both cases, Luke shifted the center of attention to the supplicant, and in making this move, he paralleled the interpretation of the two parables. But he was not out of the woods, for the widow's persistence and the villager's desperation had to be directed to someone. The identification of the judge as a God

figure complicated the issue of prayer as well as intensified the theodical question, as Jeremias and Fitzmyer both realized, and that is why the sayings in vv. 7–8 were added. The choice of an unrighteous and recalcitrant God does not inspire confidence in prayer any more than it answers the question of God's delay in vindicating the elect. Jeremias (1963, 156–57) may have been right in thinking that the parable was told to reassure the disciples that "God listens to the cry of the poor with unwearied patience" and will intervene for their redemption, but if so, the unjust judge is, at best, a poor choice to communicate such a message. To the contrary, the judge of the parable hints at a darker and more sinister God, whose callous delay fails to alleviate the suffering of the elect. It is difficult to know how such a figure could, as Linnemann (1966, 121) suggested, "restore the confidence of faith . . . to a Church that is suffering oppression and persecution, whose situation is like that of the widow."

The problems examined here provide reason enough to look for a parable of Jesus behind the parable in Luke.

The Parable of Jesus

The consensus surrounding this parable is impressive. Luke 18:1 is clearly a Lukan introduction, and vv. 7–8 are independent sayings, whether of the Risen Lord (Bultmann; Linnemann) or of the historical Jesus (Jeremias; Marshall; Bailey), attached to the parable. Only v. 6 is in some dispute. Does it belong to the parable or not? Fitzmyer (1985, 1176) and Donahue (1988, 181) regard it as part of the parable. If this is the case, it functions like the final line of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:9 and pars.), by underscoring the importance of the parable's message. But since Bultmann (1963, 175), the phrase "and the Lord said" has been seen as an attachment formula. One thing is clear: v. 6 also creates problems. It seeks to call attention to the results of the widow's persistence, but it accomplishes this purpose by refocusing attention on the judge, whose "word" now carries the meaning of the parable.

In his efforts to reconstruct the parable of Jesus, Jeremias (1963, 156) saw the dilemma clearly. He included the parable under the theological theme he called "the great assurance." The problem with the parable is that the assurance is spoken by a corrupt judge, and even if Jesus expected his hearers "to draw the conclusion from the Judge to God" by inferring from

the lesser to the greater, his choice of a “brutal judge to illustrate God’s helpfulness must have shocked his audience” to such an extent that he had to provide some interpretive comments alongside the parable. It is difficult to leap from the judge in the parable to the assurance that a gracious God will hear the anguished cries of disciples in the midst of tribulation and respond to soothe their anxiety and comfort their grief.

As he so often did, Jeremias (1963, 157) here assumed that by recontextualizing the parable in an apocalyptic framework, he had found an appropriate setting for it in the life of Jesus. When read in this setting, the parable provided the comfort needed to balance Jesus’ predictions of a future filled with “persecutions, injuries, denunciations, trials, martyrdoms [and] a final failure of faith at the revelation of Satan.” But if this was the case, why did not Jesus select a more comforting figure—a good shepherd who seeks a lost sheep, a good parent who embraces a returning child, or a good Samaritan who stops to bind up the wounds of the battered? If Jesus was saying to his disciples that they should not doubt God’s “power, goodness and help,” why include in the parable a figure who calls all three attributes into question?

Prior to Jeremias, Cadoux (1931, 182–85) thought that Jesus was counseling the disciples to emulate the widow, whose patient endurance could wear down persecution until the Son of man appeared and the real opportunity for missionary activity began. In the interim, they were to live like the widow. His reading is clearly indebted to the “interim ethic” debate launched by Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer at the turn of the century. W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 222–25) also thought the parable of Jesus proposed an interim practice, “the need of persistent prayer because of the Second Coming, which is imminent.” Its teaching was parallel to 11:5–8. B. T. D. Smith (1937, 149–54) thought that the prayer was more for divine intervention on behalf of the elect than for relief from oppression. In this context of avenging judgment, he thought “the kindly humour of the parable” somehow “out of place” but was not disturbed enough by this judgment to think that Luke had misinterpreted the parable.

The interpreters who followed Jeremias continued to develop variations on his theme. Perrin (1967, 129) thought that the parable was spoken in reference to “the total proclamation of Jesus as it challenged the individual hearer” but considered the application of the parable to prayer congruent with this view. After exploring the details of the parable with characteristic

attentiveness, Kenneth Bailey (1980, 136–37) settled for a Lukan solution: Jesus encouraged the believer to pray when fear grips her or his heart. That encouragement is based on the outcome of the parable, in which a widow against all odds was justified. In similar fashion, Marshall (1978) and Fitzmyer (1985) regarded the parable of Jesus in continuity with the Lukan reading of the parable.

As this brief overview indicates, interpreters have had great difficulty in separating the parable from its Lukan context. Even when they reconstruct the parable in a setting in the life of Jesus, they emphasize the similarities between that setting and the context in Luke. In the case of this parable, there was a perfectly good reason for the similarity: Jesus and his disciples, as well as the early church, experienced persecution. Hence the meaning of the parable in the former context was simply transferred to the latter. It was a straightforward transaction, with the possible complication that Jesus' apocalyptic expectation had to be toned down or interpreted. Nevertheless, the strength of both Jesus' disciples and the members of the early church depended on their practice of persistent prayer, so the differences mattered very little.

In this tradition of reading the parable, it is clear that the meaning of the parable has become detached from the scene presented in it, whether the interpreter purports to be explaining the parable spoken by Jesus or the parable in the context of Luke's Gospel. Because every interpreter decided that the Lukan framing was more or less accurate, the problem became how to fit the details of the parable into the theme of persistent prayer. Of course, if the parable was about prayer and the widow was the petitioner, then the judge had to be a God figure. These interpretive moves caused considerable difficulties, especially where the figure of the judge was concerned. At times, the social transaction presented in the parable and the theological reading of that scene stood in direct contradiction to each other, but this did not seem to trouble the parable's interpreters. Even scholars such as Jeremias (1963), J. D. M. Derrett (1971/72), Bailey (1980), and Bernard Scott (1989), who took time to investigate the details and background of the parable, returned to some form of Lukan solution, although Scott came closest to breaking away from it.

The incongruity between theological themes and social scene did not seem to matter. Luke's magic cast a spell over most subsequent readings, or to change the metaphor, the anomalies encountered in the parable did not

change the paradigm for interpreting it. Although interpreters constantly tried to modify the paradigm, they did not attempt a paradigm shift (see Kuhn 1970). The next section attempts to read the parable in a different context, one related to the primary scene presented in the parable.

Codifying the Injustice and Justice of the Torah

The parable of the widow and the judge presents two characters and at least two intertwined social systems that bring the characters together. To understand what limit situation the parable is codifying and what limit act the widow has taken, it is necessary first to explore the component parts of the parable. This interpretation takes the parable of Jesus to be found in vv. 2–5.

The Judge, the Torah, and the Role of "the Law"

The character of the judge is not in question. He is a judge "who neither fears God nor respects human beings" (author's translation). The earliest interpretation of the judge is found in the saying attached to the parable (v. 6), where he is called *ho kritēs tēs adikias*, "a judge of unrighteousness/injustice." Oesterley (1936, 223) thinks that the phrase is "a Hebrew form of expression" describing "a type of man of the worst kind." Manson (1949, 306) thinks the phrase "fearing neither God nor public opinion" means that the judge responds to bribes alone. Jeremias (1963, 153) takes the phrase in v. 6 to mean that the judge is "corrupt" and brutal. He is the very antithesis of the just judge described in Sir. 35:14–26, and his behavior violates the advice given by Jehoshaphat when he appointed judges in all the fortified cities of the land (2 Chron. 19:4–7). The prophet Amos denounced judges just like the one in this parable (Amos 2:6–7a; 5:10–12). In other words, the character of the judge would appear to be corrupt and unredeemable.

Bailey (1980, 130–32) adds some cultural nuances to the portrait. The judge is beyond shame; neither an appeal to God's justice nor an appeal to human need can evoke a sense of shame. As Bailey sees it, the judge's problem is "his inability to sense the evil of his actions in the presence of the one who should make him ashamed." He is unable to realize that he is

hurting the destitute widow. If Marshall (1978, 672) is correct, the expression is a variation on a proverbial theme. In an honor–shame culture or, as Scott (1989, 180) puts it, a dyadic society, "this is a severe description. . . . He is an outlaw judge."

These uniformly censorious descriptions do raise questions about what setting is imagined in the parable, who the judge is, and how he got to be a judge in the first place. Derrett (1971/72) believes that the parable depicts a widow who has avoided the customary Torah courts and has gone straight to a Hellenistic judge, because she thinks that she can expedite her case in the administrative court. Because the Jews were under Roman occupation and subject to Roman law as well as to their own Torah courts, the hearers of the parable would have understood the situation it presented. This reading poses a number of problems. Most important, it undercuts the meaning of the widow, whose standing in a Hellenistic court does not parallel her privileged position in the Torah. Even though a number of Middle Eastern cultures show a concern for widows and orphans, the status of these persons in the Torah was distinctive in the ancient world (Gustav Stahlin, in "*chēra,*" *TDNT*, 9:440–44). By Derrett's own account (1971/72, 181), Hellenistic judges often decided cases in favor of the claimant willing to offer the highest bribe, a normal and accepted practice (see Lenski 1966, on honest graft). If this is the case, why would the judge be described as shameless for doing what is natural? Finally, even allowing for the proverbial nature of the description of the judge, its particular form, "fearing God" rather than "fearing the gods," suggests a Jewish environment.

In terms of the view of Jesus' public work proposed in this study, it is characteristic of Jesus to address internal oppression, against which he can appeal to the Torah, rather than to speak to Roman oppression. Therefore, this reading of the parable takes the judge to be a Torah judge in the customary courts. As becomes evident in the following discussion, this decision raises as many questions as it answers.

Where does the judge perform his work? The parable speaks of the judge being "in a certain city," *en tini polei*. But Luke's use of "city" is not precise, and it would be unwise to conclude too much from his language (cf. Rohrbaugh 1991). Nevertheless, Scott (1989, 178) takes the description seriously because it marks the judge as one of the urban elite. He also

argues that the Mishnah's assumption that every village with a population in excess of 120 persons had a tribunal of seven judges is idealized.

While it is inherently more probable that Torah adjudicators would have been located in urban areas rather than in nucleated villages, it is not clear that they were found only in major cities. The Mishnah seems to assume the presence of Torah courts in cities and some towns (see *Shebiith* 10:4; *Sotah* 1:3), but Josephus, who is often cited to indicate the presence of local courts in towns and villages, is less clear. His brief description of establishing local courts "in each city" (*en ekastē polei*) repeats the language used by Luke without delimiting its meaning in any significant way (*War* 2.20.5). Nor does his reference to the local courts (*War* 2.14.1) that were limited to settling "petty disputes" add clarity. More important cases were forwarded to the "seventy elders" whom Josephus appointed as magistrates (*archontas*) of Galilee. The various stipulations cited in the Mishnah tractate *Sanhedrin* 1:1–3 seem to refer to Jerusalem, although it is possible that they were intended to set a pattern for all cities and towns under Jewish control. Emil Schurer (1885, II:1, 149ff.) appeals to Josephus (*Ant*. 4.8.14, 38) to justify his view that local courts each consisted of seven judges, but once again Josephus speaks of "each city" (*kath ekastēn polin*) rather than of villages or towns. In more populous cities, the "local courts would appear to have been composed of twenty-three members" (Schurer 1885, II:1, 153). The Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 1:6) specifies that a city fit to have a Sanhedrin should consist of at least "a hundred twenty men" or, according to Rabbi Nehemiah, "two hundred thirty [men]." A town with 120 men would imply a larger total population, probably closer to 300, and similarly, a town with a population of 230 men would imply a population between 500 and 600.

These figures provide a realistic understanding of what was meant by city in the ancient world. The word "city" appears to refer to market towns or other local administrative centers, as well as to urban areas such as Jerusalem, Sepphoris, and Tiberius. It would be stretching the case to argue that city refers to nucleated villages or other small peasant villages. In light of the paucity of information, it is difficult to argue with Smith's conclusion (1937, 149) that "the details of the arrangements for the administration of justice in Palestine at this time are obscure." Still, it is necessary to propose a setting for the parable, and the information gathered thus far indicates that the scene occurs either in a market town or urban center.

Whether the setting is a market town, administrative center, or city, the scene in the parable raises two questions: What is the nature of the case being adjudicated? Why is just one judge handling the case? To turn first to the case being presented in the parable, Jeremias (1963, 153) concludes that the issue "would appear to be a money matter: a debt, a pledge, or a portion of an inheritance, is being withheld from her," because a single judge could decide such a case. But the Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 1:1) specifies that "cases concerning property [are decided] by three [judges]." Herbert Danby interprets property to mean "disputes arising out of loans, inheritances, sales and the like" (Danby 1933, 382n3). Because the claimant is identified as a widow, it makes sense to infer that her case concerns her inheritance rights. S. Safrai (1976a, 787–91) has summarized the situation of widows succinctly and well: as a widow, she is entitled to be maintained from the resources of her husband's estate unless she chooses to return to her father's house, in which she case she forfeits her right to receive any maintenance from the estate of her husband. If she remains in the house of her deceased husband, she will be reduced to a menial role, to a "subordinate and humiliating position" (Stahlin, in "*chēra*," *TDNT*, 9:442). If her dead husband has unmarried brothers and she presses her right to a levirate marriage, she may even increase household tensions, especially if the brother is not inclined to fulfill his duty, an option that was available to him without disgrace (Safrai 1976a, 789). Whether she returns to her father's house or remains in her husband's house, she will be urged to remarry as soon as possible.

Jacob Neusner (1992, 175–77) places the reason for the urgency for the widow's remarriage in the perspective of the Mishnah as a whole. The political and social economy of Israel was built upon the household and the village. Within this social structure, the place of women was defined within the household, and a woman became a threat to this order when she was no longer contained within the bounds of the familiar roles of daughter or wife. Neusner points out, "The principal point of interest on Mishnah's part is the time at which a woman changes hands. . . . These are dangerous and disorderly points in the relationship of woman to man, therefore . . . to society." For this reason, "five of the seven tractates that pertain to women and family are devoted to the transfer of women, the formation and dissolution of the marital bond" (Neusner 1992, 176, 177). The widow in the parable is in just such a situation; her husband is dead, and she is

apparently attempting either to claim her maintenance from his estate or to reclaim her *ketubah*, that is, the amount of money her husband pledged to her as an inheritance in the event of his death (Danby 1933, 794; *Ketuboth* 9:6; 12:3). Of course, her situation could vary according to whether or not her deceased husband had written out her *ketubah* or other agreement permitting her maintenance from his property and goods. If there was no written agreement, the case could require litigation (see *M. Ketuboth* 4:7–12; 11:1–6). In the event that she brought inherited land or money into the marriage, her husband had its usufruct during their marriage but she could reclaim it at the dissolution of the marriage through death or divorce. In such a case, if the amount was significant, her adversaries could be numerous. Any number of family members, such as members of her deceased husband's family, a grown son, a stepson, or a son-in-law, could contest the terms. The very fact that her case is in dispute implies that a reasonably large settlement is in dispute, one at least large enough to attract adversaries.

Why was one judge handling the case? Why not a tribunal of three, as proposed by the Mishnah, or a tribunal of seven, as suggested by Josephus? *Aboth* 4:8 quotes Rabbi Ishmael as advising, "Judge not alone; for none may judge alone save One." The presence of a single judge would appear to violate both the prescription for at least three judges to settle matters of property and the theological sensitivity behind that prescription. The reason is most likely to be found in the gap between the ideal and the real. Ideally, every town with 120 or more men was to establish a tribunal of seven judges, probably drawn from the elders of the town, to adjudicate Torah at the gate. In reality, it was difficult to find enough men sufficiently learned in the Torah and oral torah to fulfill that quota. On the assumption that it was important to disperse the rule of the Torah as widely as possible, it was better to have one judge than no judges at all, even when the judges in the customary courts were affected by the intrusive presence of other systems of jurisprudence or represented the worst in their own.

What was the larger role of law in agrarian societies? Gerhard Lenski (1966, 52–53) argues that recodifying the law occupied an important step in the standard operating procedures used by elites to transform their rule by power into a rule by persuasion, the rule of might into the rule of right. Because laws are "stated in general and impersonal terms, they appear to support abstract principles of justice rather than the special interests of

particular [groups] or classes of [people].” The task of scribal retainers was to recodify laws in such a way that they seemed to support justice while actually protecting and expanding the prerogatives of the ruling elites. In other words, law codes were part of the cover story, the pursuit of justice, that masked the real story, the extension of power and control. Because the general provision codified in the law preceded the specific case, it was possible to make its application to a particular situation appear to be impartial and universal even as it served the interest of the ruling class. Gaining control of the law and its interpretation, therefore, was one important tool in establishing ideological control. In Palestine, the use of an oral torah to interpret the Torah provided an institutionalized procedure and framework for continually recodifying the Torah to protect special interests while presenting the process as merely applying the principles of justice found in the law of Moses and handed down to Moses at Sinai. This maneuver becomes clearer when the situation of the widow is examined in the next section.

One implication from the summary just presented is that the officers of the court were appointed to serve the interests of their rulers, not to dispense impartial justice. No less than the scribal retainers who reformulated the provisions of the law to serve the interests of the ruling elite, the judges whose decisions applied those codes and set precedents for their implementation were in the service of the elites. The problem they faced was how to appear as representatives of justice while consistently rendering decisions in favor of the richer and more powerful. The only surprising element in the parable is that the judge seems to have abandoned all pretense of impartiality and has become openly what he has been covertly, a judge of injustice.

The Widow

A widow was in a particularly vulnerable situation, and for that very reason, she was a target for exploitation. This may explain why the widow was the subject of such concern in the Torah and Prophets. The classic passage is Exod. 22:21–24, where God promises to hear the cry of the afflicted widow or orphan as surely as God heard the cry of the people in slavery in Egypt. Other passages with similar concerns abound (cf. Deut. 10:16–18; 14:28–29; 24:17–18; 26:12–13; 27:19; Isa. 1:16–17, 23; 10:1–2;

Jer. 7:5–7; 22:3; Ezek. 22:6–7; Zech. 7:8–12; Pss. 68:5; 94:6; 146:9). The very number of such passages indicates that the plight of the widow posed an acute problem for Israel. For this reason, the cases of orphans and widows were supposed to receive priority, orphans' cases being heard first, then the cases of widows. Thus her plea in the parable is not for vengeance against her adversary (*antidikos*) but for vindication. According to J. L. Moulton and G. Milligan (1930, 193), *ekdikeō* can mean "do right to" or protect the wronged party.

In light of the material on the role of law in agrarian societies, the hiatus between the justice of the Torah and the practical workings of everyday injustice may be clearer. Bailey (1980, 133–34) believes that the parable makes the following three assumptions:

1. The widow is in the right (and being denied justice);
2. For some reason, the judge does not want to serve her (she has paid no bribes?);
3. The judge prefers to favor her adversary (either the adversary is influential or he *has* paid bribes).

How is this implied by the parable? By every reckoning, the widow is being denied justice because she is being denied access to the court. Rather than hear her case on an urgent or priority basis, the judge stalls, dawdles, and refuses to hear her case. He is violating the Torah in putting her off, an indication that the stakes are high enough to induce him to delay the case. It is in this context that he "neither fears God nor respects human beings." If "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10; cf. Prov. 1:7), the judge's fearlessness shows itself in his disregard of the Torah and his willingness to serve as sole judge in the case, a role forbidden by the rabbis. That he is sole judge may not only indicate the irregularity of the court but also imply the reason for that irregularity. The powerful and wealthy adversaries are using the system for their own purposes. It is cheaper to bribe one judge than three, and in spite of the numerous warnings in the Torah against taking bribes, it is always possible to find a judge whose price is right. It is also easier to persuade one corrupt judge, rather than a tribunal, to "do the right thing," by which the adversaries mean settle the case in their favor and at the expense of the widow. After all, behind the facade of justice, the real role of Torah in the eyes of the ruling class is to extend the

reach of the wealthy and the control of property. Thus the judge appears to be avoiding a trial before him; he would prefer to settle matters informally, behind the scenes, where he can work out a mutually acceptable deal with the adversaries. Usually such deals were kept sequestered and secluded.

What is clear is that the judge most likely shares class interests in common with the adversaries. Derrett (1971/72, 181) thinks that the customary Torah courts were staffed by "local notabilities" and that it was a singular "social as well as political distinction" to be single referee. They must have been "men renowned for piety" who would approach cases with "a keen and impartial mind." Even allowing for Derrett's characteristic idealization of the Jewish system of jurisprudence over against the Roman or Hellenistic systems of law, and even if he is right about the honor bestowed on a person deemed worthy to function as a single judge, he is describing the ideal as if it were the actual situation. However, history and society are messier than the ideal.

Likewise, Scott (1989, 178) assumes that the judge in the parable is a member of the urban elite upon whom has been bestowed the honor of judgeship. If so, then the judge shares class solidarity with the adversaries. But using the model of agrarian societies found in Lenski (1966) would lead to a different conclusion. The judge would be a member of the retainer class, hoping to receive his "honest graft" for doing his duty. If this is the case, the presence of one judge could imply either an urban or a town setting. The tribunal may not be absent because there are too few qualified judges but because the adversaries are attempting to circumvent the use of a panel of judges. This ploy should not be surprising, because the conflict between the ideal Torah and its actual use is present wherever the system of Torah is present. Scott (1989, 183) is quite right when he observes, "The described scene is a clear violation of Jewish legal practice in several ways."

The judge utterly fails to perceive the consequences of his behavior on the widow. This obtuseness is the clearest indicator of his lack of shame. As Bailey (1980, 132) puts it, "The problem with this judge . . . is his inability to sense the evil of his actions in the presence of the one who should make him ashamed. In this case, he is hurting a destitute widow." The widow's plight is poor collateral for his greed, and he chooses to align himself with those who devour widows' houses (cf. Mark 12:38–40).

As numerous scholars have pointed out, the concern over corrupt judges is endemic in the literature of the time. Bailey (1980, 131), for example, cites an example from A. Edersheim (1896, 2:287) of judges in Jerusalem who were so corrupt that their real title, “Judges of Prohibitions” (*Dayyaney Gezeroth*), was changed to another more reflective of their activity, “Robber-Judges” (*Dayyaney Gezeloth*). He also notes a passage from the Talmud that “speaks of village judges who are willing to pervert justice for a dish of meat.” Given the nature of agrarian society and the roles played by retainers, these outcomes are not surprising. The retainers modeled themselves on their superiors, whose lives were devoted to accumulation of wealth and power. Just as elites used their appointments to political office for personal aggrandizement and gain, so the retainers imitated their activity but on a smaller scale. The judge in the parable is doing what he has learned to do, use his office to line his pockets. This was so common that it did not seem either unjust or immoral. It was simply the way the system worked; it was “honest graft,” as Lenski (1966) calls it.

These realities also explain why the gap existed between the Torah as an ideal and the Torah as an actual law code for determining particular situations. When one descends from the rarefied atmosphere of the ideals into the details of everyday life, the Torah changes. It becomes a tool for legitimation and social control, prescribing and proscribing behavior, and it is also employed to protect the interests of a ruling class. The Torah is translated in these changing circumstances by the production of an oral torah in the hands of a class of scribal retainers working at the behest of powerful ruling class interests and then applied to specific cases by a class of judicial retainers. This is the Torah at work in the parable. When property and wealth are at stake, disputes arise, and when the disputes are complicated by issues of family honor and the threat of a woman out of place in the social order, the conflicts can intensify.

Although the Torah and, presumably, the oral torah provided protection for the widow and orphan, their plight was common enough for the word “widow” to become a synonym for the poor or the destitute. A number of scholars have suggested that the very presence of a widow at court is in itself an extraordinary event that witnesses to her vulnerability. Women did not normally appear at court but were represented by a male family member (Bailey 1980, 134–35). Indeed, the very fact that the widow in the parable has appeared before the judge is a breach of etiquette. That she is

representing herself may indicate that she has no family to which she can appeal for help. In this condition, her life may depend on the settlement of her case.

The conflict in the parable is becoming clearer. In her appeal to the judge, “Grant me justice against my opponent,” the widow appeals to the Torah as an ideal code of justice. In his failure to respond to her, the judge acts out of the Torah as used as a system of expediency designed to protect the wealthy and their interests and to reward him for doing his job. If everything proceeds according to schedule, the judge will do business as usual and strike a deal with the adversary. In return for settling the case in favor of the adversary’s interests, he will receive appropriate fees. The judge portrayed in the parable is accustomed to working in this way, and it appears that he has gained a notorious reputation for his expediency. It is ironic that a judge of the Torah neither fears the God who gave the Torah to Moses nor respects the human beings it was specifically designed to protect, but it is neither inconceivable nor unknown. The widow is well aware of the maneuverings and scheming against her; she also knows the odds are stacked against her. But she is a desperate woman. Donahue (1988, 182) does not exaggerate when he suggests that the case could be a life-and-death issue for her: “she is faced with poverty and starvation if her rights are not respected.” She has no male family members or kinship support; everything is in her hands.

The Widow’s Strategy and Its Outcome

What can the widow do? She adopts and adapts the strategy of her adversaries. First, she adopts their strategy by making the issue a matter between the judge and herself. She does not ask for a court date or demand a court appearance to face her opponents. She appeals directly to the judge for justice, just as her adversaries have appealed to him for a favorable verdict. Second, she adapts their strategy by going public in a most embarrassing way, rather than trying to arrange an accommodation behind the scenes. In the midst of all the male voices heard at the gate, a domain where men alone are in control, one woman’s voice continually cries out for justice. Numerous scholars have cited the episode from H. B. Tristram (1894, 228–29; cited in Bailey, 1980, 134; et al.) that purports to be a

doublet of the parable and does bear impressive resemblances to it. The purpose for citing Tristram is to illustrate that a woman could be heard in a Middle Eastern court, however unusual an instance it might be.

The widow's opponents have remained silent. They have been negotiating quietly and discreetly with the judge. The judge's delay may signal that those negotiations are not completed and that he is still not certain of the outcome. Perhaps the social difference between the well-situated and powerful adversaries and the exposed widow is so great that they are assured of the outcome but in no hurry to negotiate a settlement. The longer they wait, the more favorable the terms may be, especially since the widow is making a spectacle of herself and embarrassing the judge as well. Time is on their side. All of their communication with the judge has been through channels and out of the public eye. This way of proceeding avoids awkward questions and guarantees the results in advance. It is better not to leave the outcome of an important matter in the hands of a panel of judges. It gets too complicated that way.

While the system is working according to its implied rules, the widow tries to blow the cover off the operation. She refuses to remain silent but breaks the silence surrounding the covert machinations. Walter Wink (1992) recently described the contours of what he calls "the Domination System." Like all oppressive forms of rule, it lives by the lies or cover stories it creates. This sets up the role of the prophet.

> When anyone steps out of the system and tells the truth, lives the truth, that enables everyone else to peer behind the curtain, too. . . . Anyone who steps out of line therefore *denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety*. . . . If the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth. (Wink 1992, 98)

This could be a description of the widow in the parable. She speaks the truth about the Torah and blows the cover of those who co-opt it and corrupt it to serve their greed. But she does so not by denouncing the judge but by demanding he do his duty. To denounce him would risk alienating him or calling down his wrath, and if his reputation is an indicator, it would do little good anyway. So she calls him to accountability. This reversal of roles has an amazing effect; but it is not accomplished easily or quickly, for the

delusional power of the Domination System is considerable. It takes constant repetition and nagging persistence to break through the wall of silence erected to protect the cover story and disguise the truth. Paulo Freire speaks of this as emerging from the culture of silence and naming the world.

The judge experiences this assault as a battering: “she will wear me out with her continual bruising.” The verb *hypōpiazē* is a boxing term that refers to the continual blows that eventually give one a black eye. The significance of the verb is that it portrays the widow as active and aggressive. Too many women in her situation accept the inevitable and submit to the injustice of the system. Quite clearly, the widow knows that she can appeal to neither the judge’s honor nor his compassion, so she keeps punching away, undeterred by the defensive posture of the judge. She does not appeal to the judge’s idealism; that would be futile and fruitless. But she does test the limits of his expediency. Even the judge may eventually decide that it is simply too costly to continue the stalemate. Her adversaries are stalling for time; she is pestering him relentlessly and publicly. Though he feels no shame in delaying his verdict to cut the best deal he can, he also wants to move on. There will be other, less troublesome, and more rewarding cases. The widow is forcing the judge to reevaluate the cost–benefit ratio of her case. This judge may be so “blinded by his power” (Donahue 1988, 182) that he is blind to the desperation of the poor, but he knows when the impediments of a case make it inadvisable to prolong it. He can cut his losses and move on. Limit acts can change limit situations.

There is still another dimension to the judge’s decision. He does not care about the widow, and he is not duped by the Torah’s rhetoric about God’s care for the widows and orphans. He has been around too long to fall for any form of idealism. But he still lives in a dyadic society (Malina 1981, 51–93), in which his value is equivalent to his value in others’ eyes. Although he is clear about his role as judge, he still has to wear the mantle of justice in public and keep the cover story alive. Part of the ascribed honor of his position depends on the general belief that he is interpreting God’s Torah. If the widow keeps crying out, she may begin to raise questions, and her audience may begin to have “ears to hear” what is really going on and develop “eyes to see” the reality behind the facade. These developments would adversely affect his social status, prestige, and access to wealth and

power. What better way to reinforce the common perception than to grant the widow's request? Even if she is the exception that proves the rule, her case will be cited to prove the justice of the courts. It would be better to grant her request than to risk the system. It will also teach the overly confident adversaries a well-deserved lesson. In the future, other families will come to terms more quickly. Thus the judge may be motivated by his own version of honor and shame standards, although they are discrepant with those of the Torah.

Two commentators on this parable have ventured summaries of its meaning that cohere with the reading being developed here. Donahue (1988, 184) suggests that "the parable is rife with reversal and paradox" because it appears that the widow is the powerful one who confronts the judge. She embodies a new vision of the world in which "victims will claim their rights and seek justice—often in an unsettling manner." Scott (1989, 187) hazards the following guess about the import of the parable: "The kingdom keeps coming, keeps battering down regardless of honor or justice. It may even come under the guise of shamelessness (lack of honor)." This is all well and good as far as it goes, but both commentators fail to account for the flexibility and adaptability of systematic oppression and may confuse the exception for a new rule.

Conclusion

The parable poses a dilemma. A desperate widow is caught in the usual power play accompanying her husband's death, and she is further enmeshed in the complexities of a Torah court. At first glance, her case appears hopeless. Everyone knows that the court will decide in favor of the party offering the most "appropriate" emolument, that is, bribe. One less widow in Israel! One more "righteous" verdict for the court! Unaccountably, the widow refuses to quit and threatens to blow the cover off the whole system. Her reward is justice at the gate. She was able to analyze her limit situation and design a limit action that broke the spell of inevitability cast by the ruling elites.

At some fundamental level, the oppressed must collude in their oppression for the system to work. Usually that collusion grows out of a sense of fatalism and despair that anything will change. Yet this parable poses a limit situation with a familiar social script. The deck is stacked

against the widow; she does not even have a male relative to represent her in the Torah court. She should just stay out of sight in a manner appropriate for a widow in mourning—out of sight, out of mind. Then the parties in the case can work out their arrangement, undisturbed by the widow's claims. The refusal of the widow to accept her predestined role breaks social barriers and crosses forbidden social and gender boundaries. The result of her shameless behavior is a just verdict.

The parable poses interesting problems. Perhaps the strongly sanctioned social boundaries contribute to the systematic oppression of the day. If so, how can they be changed? Why does the very behavior that the hearers judge to be shameless and inappropriate force a just verdict? How can what is dishonorable produce justice? The parable implies some disturbing proposals. But limit acts, by definition, depart from the patterns that govern everyday life, because the so-called normal patterns of behavior have long since accommodated to the systematic oppression that controls daily life. The widow has managed to break the mold. What can be learned from her course of action in this particular case?

13

A Weapon of the Weak

The Parable of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1–9)

The parable of the unjust steward has long been considered one of the more puzzling parables of Jesus. Yet interpreters have not been at a loss to propose possible meanings. Intrepretation abhors a vacuum, and interpreters will provide a profusion of readings when the meaning of a text is unclear. Yet after all is said and done, the parable continues to puzzle and tantalize its interpreters by leaving the distinct impression that, in spite of all earnest efforts, its core mystery has not been discovered.

This chapter reads the parable as an example of how the vulnerable utilize what James Scott (1985) calls “the weapons of the weak” in their endless struggle for survival in a hostile world governed by invisible elites. Specifically, the parable presents a limit situation, a steward (estate manager) summarily dismissed from his job on the basis of hostile rumors, and follows the steward’s limit acts that seek to ensure his survival.

The Lukan Reading of the Parable

In characteristic fashion, Luke interpreted this troublesome parable by joining it to a series of sayings that seem to explicate its meaning, although in this case the line that separates the parable from the attached sayings is not very clear. Where does the parable end? And where do the sayings

begin? Since the turn of the century, scholars have proposed at least four possibilities. The first is that the parable ends with v. 7; Joachim Jeremias (1963) and John Dominic Crossan (1973) have, for different reasons, argued this position. For Jeremias, the parable closes with v. 7 because "the Lord" mentioned in v. 8a is Jesus and the phrase with which v. 8 begins, "And the Lord commended the dishonest steward for operating shrewdly" (author's translation), introduces Jesus' comment on the parable. Crossan argues, on literary grounds, that the parable ends with v. 7, a decision in keeping with Crossan's tendency to minimize the materials that belong to the earliest form of the parables. His motto seems to be: The more enigmatic the story and the more paradoxical its language, the more original the parable.

The second possibility is that the parable ends with v. 8a (Oesterley 1936; Bailey 1976; Donahue 1988; Scott 1989). In this case, "the master" of v. 8a is the master of the steward whose reaction concludes the plot of the parable. The NRSV has clearly chosen this option by translating v. 8a "And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly." The decision to end the parable with v. 8a identifies the interpretive problem rather clearly: to discover the meaning of the parable, one must understand why the master commended the steward for what appears to be dishonest and deceitful behavior.

The third possibility is that the parable ends with v. 8b. Because v. 9 begins with an attachment formula (*kai egō hymin legō*) that marks it as a later addition, v. 8b is left in dispute. Most scholars judge it to be an addition to the parable, perhaps an early attempt to explain the puzzling commendation in v. 8a (Oesterley 1936, 198; Scott 1989, 258). But it could also represent the lesson of the steward's story as it has been set in an eschatological framework. In this case, the parable tells the story of "the sons of this world" as a foil against which to judge the behavior of the "sons of light."

The fourth possibility is that the parable ends with v. 9. Many scholars consider v. 9 the proper ending of the parable, although it is usually seen to be in need of emendation of one kind or another to fit the context of the parable. It has been read as a rhetorical question, "Shall I tell you, make friends for yourselves . . . ?" which assumes a clearly negative answer (Jannaris 1901/2, 129–30; Baverstock 1937, 81); or it has been identified as a Semiticism that should properly read, "Make friends for yourselves

without the mammon of unrighteousness" (Scott 1937/38, 235; cf. Compston 1919/20, 282; Wansey 1935/36, 39–40). Finally, it has been seen as an example of grim sarcasm, whose biting message formed a fitting conclusion to the parable (Collins 1910/11, 525–26; Baverstock 1937, 81–82; Paul 1958, 192–93; Hiers 1970, 30–31). The argument used earlier in this study (chapter 10) that the attachment formula in the first person could be an emphasis formula does not work well here because the meaning of v. 9 is so difficult to determine. Why would Luke emphasize a saying more obscure than the parable itself to interpret its meaning?

J. A. Fitzmyer (1964) has probably synthesized the results of scholarship on the form of this parable as well as anyone. When outlined, it can be summed up as follows:

16:1–7	the body of the parable
16:8a	its probable conclusion
16:8b–9	"eschatological lesson on prudence"
16:10–12	"a lesson on responsible management"
16:13 (Matt. 6:24; Q)	a generalizing conclusion

C. H. Dodd's (1935, 30) frequently quoted remark may provide a glimpse into the way these materials were collected and why they were added to the parable: "We can almost see here notes for three separate sermons on the parable as text." Some scholars would separate v. 8b from v. 9, limiting the lesson on eschatological prudence to v. 8b while finding in v. 9 a concern for the eschatological meaning of almsgiving to the poor (Hiers 1970, 33–36; Williams 1964, 293–94). It is also possible that the use of catchwords rather than thematic similarity originally brought together the materials in vv. 10–13. For example, "mammon" (*mamōna;* translated as "wealth" in NRSV) serves as a catchword uniting vv. 9, 11, and 13, and the theme of faithfulness (*pistos*) unites vv. 10, 11, and 12. Finally, it seems clear that the Q saying in 16:13 is only tenuously related to the parable, because the steward does not attempt to serve two masters but tries to remain employed by the one who is determined to dismiss him.

T. W. Manson (1949, 291–93) believes that the parable traces to a collection of special Lukan materials (usually designated as L) whose major theme is "the Gospel of the Outcast." The point of the parable can be

summed up as follows: if a bad man will take pains to make friends to cushion his fall, then good people should also take time to make friends to further the reign of God. The parable therefore implicitly criticizes the censoriousness of the scribes and Pharisees, whose efforts are aimed at alienating the very people they would do better to court with kindness and friendship. This concern for the poor is given a distinctively Lukan twist in v. 9, which introduces the theme of wealth. Richard Hiers (1970, 33) notes the thematic similarity of v. 9 to Luke 12:33 and other Lukan texts that bring together concern for the poor and the coming of the reign of God (for example, 6:24–25; 10:34–35; 12:15–21; 14:13–14; 18:24–25; 19:8). Similarly, Francis Williams (1964, 293–94) has argued that almsgiving is the theme of the parable when it is viewed through the lens of v. 9. Taken together, parable and comment form an a fortiori argument, or an argument from the lesser to the greater, much like the arguments in Luke 11:13 (parallel Matt. 7:11 and Q) and 18:6–7. Williams summarizes the meaning of the texts as follows: “If even worldlings are shrewd enough to recognize the value of handling their master’s money, should not the servants of God realize the value of almsgiving?”

The value of these efforts to read the parable (vv. 1–8a) in the context of its attached sayings (vv. 8b–13) is that they look for contexts of understanding that will hold together the diverse materials contained in the first part of Luke 16. The results seem to indicate that Luke muted the eschatological tones of the parable by sublimating them to issues of ethics. Jeremias (1963, 45–48) would say that the parable was shifted in use from the eschatological to the hortatory. In this case, the early community “drew from [the parable] a direction for the right use of wealth and a warning against unfaithfulness.” Given this perspective, Jeremias could see the unity of the original parable and its attached lessons. Inherent in Jesus’ proclamation of the coming reign of God and its call to repentance were “the generosity of v. 9, the faithfulness of vv. 10–12, and the rejection of mammon in v. 13.” Luke merely shifted the emphasis of the materials to reflect the needs of his audience.

Another approach to understanding the parable placed it in the context of 15:11–32, the parable of the prodigal son, which immediately precedes the parable of the dishonest steward. John Donahue (1988, 167–68) identifies ten structural and thematic similarities that unite the two parables. This leads him to believe that the parable of the dishonest steward should be read

rather as the parable of “the foolish master,” whose counterpart is the father in the preceding parable. Taken together, the figures of the father and the master define a God whose forgiveness overrides the human machinations of an errant son and a scheming steward. Both L. John Topel and William Loader find variations of this theme in the parable. Loader (1989, 521–30) views the parable “christologically” as Jesus’ self-presentation. In the person of the steward, Jesus shrewdly portrays the outrageous and scandalous cancellation of debt that so upset the religious authorities of his day. Topel (1975, 225) finds that “in its final stage our parable teaches a forgiveness which is beyond all human expectation, and even seems unjust by human standards.” As the earlier group of scholars found distinctive Lukan ethical themes in the parable and attached sayings, this second group has identified distinctively Lukan theology in the same materials.

If this reading has any merit, it implies that Luke has interpreted the troubling story of the steward by assimilating it to its immediate predecessor (15:11–32), whose meaning is much clearer. He has also provided a narrative framework that holds the materials together in a common and continuous structure (15:1–3a, 11a; 16:1a, 14). That framework is flexible enough to encompass three distinct groups of hearers: the tax collectors and sinners (15:1), the Pharisees and scribes (15:2; 16:14), and the disciples (16:1). Each of these groups, in turn, has suggested a different way of reading the materials. As is seen in the next section, these Lukan audiences also became the prototypes for the hearers of the parable spoken by “the historical Jesus.”

The Parable of Jesus

Rudolf Bultmann (1963, 199) was convinced that the original point of this similitude had been lost. It was “obviously meant to say that one can learn from the slyness of a deceiver; but in what way?” His reserve has not been shared by others. A. T. Cadoux (1931, 135–37) took the parable to express Jesus’ criticism of the high priestly families of Jerusalem who had compromised their spiritual positions to collude with the Roman overlords for financial gain. If they had abused their financial trust, who would “credit them with spiritual authority?” Although Dodd (1935, 31) was convinced that “there was no certain clue to the application of the parable” by the time it reached Luke, he was ready to speculate about its meaning for

Jesus' hearers. It may have referred to the Sadducean priesthood, who "made a merit of keeping in with the Romans" through their sharp practices, or it may have had in its purview the Pharisees, who sought to win divine favor with some well-placed almsgiving. In either case, the parable confronted its hearers with the need for an urgent decision in light of the crisis in which they were placed. Like the steward, they needed to do "some strenuous thinking" to discover "a drastic means of coping" with their situation.

Jeremias (1963, 181–82) thought the parable depicted "the challenge of the hour." He imagined Jesus hearing the story of the steward being "indignantly related to him" with the expectation that he would condemn the steward's dishonesty. But Jesus turns the story on his hearers, including the villager who had related it. He begins by commending the steward (Jeremias understood "the Lord" in v. 8a to refer to Jesus) and thereby interprets the parable as saying, "You are in the same position as this steward who saw the imminent disaster threatening him with ruin. Learn from him! Take decisive action to address your situation!" At least this steward had enough "shrewdness" (*phronimōs*) to recognize his dilemma and act accordingly. Indeed, Jeremias (1963, 46) took "shrewd" to mean one who has "grasped the eschatological situation." In other words, Jeremias understood v. 8 as Jesus' interpretation of the story (vv. 1–7) that was related to him. If v. 9 did belong with the parable, Jeremias believed that it was addressed to the tax farmers and other dishonest persons who worked with "tainted money," the "mammon of unrighteousness." This would mean that Jesus heard the story of the dishonest steward, first turned it on all of his hearers as an eschatological warning, and then addressed an additional remark to the toll collectors in the crowd.

Following in Jeremias's footsteps, Norman Perrin (1967, 109–15) argued that the parable of Jesus calls for the "necessity for decision NOW." Jesus used the parable to call his hearers to face the crisis confronting them in the proclamation of the coming reign of God. As with Jeremias, for Perrin this meant that Jesus commended the dispatch with which the steward marshaled his resources to face the crisis in which he was thrown by the master's impending judgment on his stewardship.

Kenneth Bailey (1976, 86) followed Jeremias in viewing the parable as "an eschatological warning to sinners" but placed the emphasis of the parable on the master's "extraordinary mercy." Once the master learns of

the steward's mismanagement, he does not immediately throw him in jail but rather asks him to turn in his account books. The steward rightly perceives this as the act of a noble and merciful master, and in his subsequent scheme, he stakes everything on that mercy. This being the case, the steward "is praised for his wisdom in knowing where his salvation lay, not for his dishonesty" (Bailey 1976, 107).

Three interpreters have emphasized the picaresque quality of the rogue steward. Dan Via (1967, 155–62) thinks it unlikely that those hearing the parable would have had "their attention drawn immediately to the impending apocalyptic dissolution of the world which Jesus proclaimed in non-parabolic" ways. The parable does indeed seem to say that "the present is a crisis because the future is threatening," but it then appeals to a comic story and a picaresque rogue to reduce the threat. The story of the marginal steward invites its hearers to take a moral holiday by vicariously enjoying the steward's caper. This provides an opportunity for the hearers to work off their similar impulses through the vehicle of the story. Its "word" to its audience is that "our well being does not ultimately rest on our dead seriousness." Crossan (1973, 104–11) places the parable of the dishonest steward in the second group of servant parables (Group B), which calls into question "the presumptive correlation of good with reward and bad with punishment" found in the first group of servant parables (Group A). The steward provides little more than "a picture of laziness organizing itself under crisis," and his strategy seems to be devoted to creating "a sort of Robin Hood image out of his inefficiency." To get him out of the mess, he appeals to the very incompetence and sloth that got him into it to begin with. Bernard Scott (1989, 258–66) is convinced that Crossan has missed the point of the parable because he has confused the trickster subplot with the main story line. The master's final commendation of the steward undermines the picaresque plot and unsettles the hearers who have identified with the rogue and sanctioned his immoral plan to dupe the master. As a result, "the hearer in the world of the kingdom [established by the surprise ending of the parable] must establish new coordinates for power, justice and vulnerability."

Each reading of the parable as a word of the historical Jesus has assumed the meaning of the scene depicted in the parable. J. Steele (1927/28, 236–37) recognized that "underlying this parable is a recognized custom of the time, acquaintance with which was assumed by our Lord," and that "to

understand the custom is to get at the heart of the parable and to understand its application." The problem was to know how to get at the custom depicted in the story. Frederick Beames (1912/13, 150) realized that the parables were told to Galilean peasants and are "remarkable for their homeliness," containing as they do "descriptions of the everyday life with which our Lord's hearers were familiar." However, it is one thing to define the problem in these terms and quite another to solve it. Most commentators have been content to sketch the social scene before moving ahead to the more interesting ethical and theological applications of the parable. Manson (1949, 291) even argued that attempts to understand the details of the parable actually hindered efforts to interpret its meaning. The difficulties of interpreting the parable, he suggested, "arise from trying to press the details of the story instead of seeking for the main point." Just how one could discern the main point in the absence of some grasp of the details of the social scene presented by the story Manson did not say. The alternative to struggling with the details of the story would be a reliance either on intuition or on the sayings that follow the parable.

In light of the dismaying variety of readings proposed by commentators who did not linger over the details of the story, it would be reasonable to surmise that the meaning of the parable may be more rooted in its social scene than commentators have allowed. It is therefore important to attend to the social scene presented in the parable as a prelude to asking what meanings it might convey.

The Social Scene Presented in the Parable

The most common assumption about the scene in the parable is that it represents small village life. The master is an absentee landlord whose steward manages his estates, and the debtors are the peasants who farm his lands or tend his orchards. They may be either tenants or freeholders who also work the master's estates. There are problems with this scenario, but they are examined later in this chapter.

The Rich Master and the Steward

Bailey (1976, 90) goes so far as to suggest that the master is a local aristocrat who is "clearly a part of the community." This reflects Bailey's

unwarranted assumption that “the wealthy, distant, foreign ruthless landowner is unknown in the synoptic parables.” This study has already shown that there is good reason to question Bailey’s assertion. With the possible exception of the qualifier “foreign,” just such absentee elites appear in a number of parables examined in earlier chapters. Bailey has staked his reading of the parable on the fact that the master is a God figure whose extraordinary mercy sets the action in motion. This exegetical commitment explains his desire to portray the master as a local noble of high moral character. He even goes so far as to assert that “any line of argumentation that places the person and character of the master in a bad light will need substantial support” (Bailey 1976, 88).

Given the exploitive and predatory character of elites in advanced agrarian societies, this study argues just the opposite position. The master depicted in the parable is described as *plousios*, a clear indicator of wealth and prestige. Whether the master is an absentee landlord who visits his estates on occasion or a member of the local nobility who lives closer to his estates, perhaps in a nearby urban center, he belongs to the elite class. The figures on the contracts indicate large holdings of land, including orchards. Manson (1949, 292) estimates the value of one hundred *cors* of wheat, which equals about 1,083 bushels, at twenty-five hundred to three thousand denarii. His estimate is based on information from the Mishnah (*Baba Metzia* 5:1, which cites the price of a *cor* of wheat at twenty-five to thirty denarii). Jeremias (1963, 181) adds that the amount equals the yield of one hundred acres of land, and James Breech (1983, 108) gauges that it yields an amount equal to seven-and-one-half years wages. Similarly, one hundred *baths* of oil, which equals about eight hundred to nine hundred gallons, represents the yield of about one-hundred fifty olive trees and a debt of one thousand denarii. Even allowing for Jeremias’s observation (1963, 181) that “Jesus betrays the oriental story-teller’s love for large numbers,” it makes little sense to inflate numbers just for the sake of their shock value. Even the details communicate some meaning. In this case, they identify the social class of the master. The numbers, inflated or not, are social markers that help the audience to place the absentee master in his appropriate social class. He belongs to the ruling elite who control the land and the lives of “the people of the land.”

W. O. E. Oesterley (1936, 192–94) is convinced that the fate of the steward indicates that the scene presented in the parable was Jewish, not

Roman. A steward on a Roman estate (*villicus*) would most likely be a slave, whose mismanagement would have been punished by "death, or imprisonment, or torture, or degradation" but certainly not by manumission. However, after rejecting the Roman scenario, Oesterley (1936, 193–95) digresses into a curious apology for slavery in a Jewish setting because he thinks that the Jewish steward would still be a household slave. The steward is still a slave but in a Jewish household where slaves were treated like one of the family, a *ben bayit* (cf. Fitzmyer 1964, 35). Oesterley goes so far as to argue that the legislation regarding slaves "was of a most merciful character. . . . For a Jewish slave to leave his master's house was like leaving home." This eulogy for a merciful slavery that has "gone with the wind" seems no more convincing for first-century Palestine than for the antebellum South in America. Moreover, it is unnecessary in light of the course of events in the parable.

The fact that the steward is dismissed indicates that he is a retainer, not a slave, although a retainer in the household of an elite was nearly as dependent as a slave but without the security associated with slavery. A slave was, after all, property worth preserving. When the steward contemplates his future after he has been dismissed from his stewardship, he envisions bleak alternatives, begging and digging, the common activities of day laborers. The steward does not contemplate a demotion in the household hierarchy of slaves or even think of being sold to the mines or galley ships, because he is not a slave. But his alternatives are little better. Thomas Carney (1975, 53) has seen clearly that everyone within the bureaucracy, even its lowest functionaries, is privileged compared to those who live outside it. A chasm nearly as great as the one separating Lazarus from the rich man separates the steward from the beggars and ditch-diggers he must contemplate joining. If the steward loses his position, he loses not just a stewardship but access to the household bureaucracy itself.

Most commentary on v. 3 seems utterly ignorant of its meaning. Oesterley (1936, 197) thinks that the steward rejects begging because it is not honorable and digging because it is too hard for one accustomed to scribal activity. Via (1967, 161) depicts the roguish steward as simply rejecting honest alternatives because both begging and digging "were a part of the regular world of his day." According to Breech (1983, 105–6), the steward first violates the relationship of trust he has enjoyed with his master and then blames the master while assuming for himself the role of victim.

In this role, his soliloquy reveals him as “weak and proud.” He rejects honest work, preferring to sponge off of others as he has connived to live off his master. He is “incompetent,” “selfish,” and “irresponsible.” Bailey (1976, 98) offers a more generous assessment of the steward’s rejection of digging and begging. Owing to his life as a scribe, he is too weak to dig; he does not reject it because it is beneath his dignity. But he does reject begging as a “legitimate, although despised profession.” Scott (1989, 263) believes that the steward “has taken on the airs of the rich,” and although he does not say so, Crossan (1973, 109–10) would clearly see the steward’s laziness and sloth as motives for rejecting honest hard work.

None of the commentators seems to realize the social meaning of the choices captured by *skaptein* or *epaitein*. Digging is “the hardest kind of work [that] the uneducated workman must engage in” (BAGD 753). To lose his stewardship and join the work force of day laborers is to drop out of the class of retainers into the class of expendables. With nothing left to offer but his animal energy, the former steward will have little chance of competing for jobs with peasants who have worked all their lives or with the excess children of village artisans who have fallen into the class of expendables. Having been accustomed to regular meals, he will adapt poorly to irregular meals interspersed with long periods of hunger. As he loses what little strength he has, he will become a beggar until, like Lazarus and thousands of others, he dies from the complications of malnutrition and disease. His dismissal from the stewardship is a death sentence that has nothing to do with his refusal to accept honest work.

If, as Via notes, digging and begging were regular parts of the steward’s world, so was the kind of death associated with them. It was the fall of people like the steward from the higher classes—retainers, artisans, merchants, or the peasantry—into the class of expendables that kept the population of this destitute group from being completely depleted by disease and death. The trick was to keep the number of people entering the class of expendables consistent with the number dying from malnutrition. The steward is faced with a life-and-death situation when the master removes the stewardship from him. To interpret the steward’s soliloquy, with Breech (1983, 110), as an example of egoism compounded by a cowardly instinct for self-preservation, both of which reveal “signs of a blocked and weakened life,” is to miss the point of the inner monologue. The ousted steward faces the alternatives of death by digging or death by

begging (cf. Sir. 40:28; *War*. 2.295; Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Fitzgerald 1954, 1364). It is a grim reality whose import must not be ignored or understated.

What, then, was the position the steward occupied before being called to account for his actions? He was an estate manager (*oikonomos*), a position of considerable authority and trust. J. D. M. Derrett (1961b, 200–204) has reviewed the laws of agency as they applied to a figure such as the one in the parable and has concluded that the steward was "an agent of the most comprehensive authority" in whom the absent master had invested a great trust. The steward had been given "wide discretionary powers," making his position more fiduciary in character than contractual. He was able to represent his master, act on his behalf, enter into contracts, and in general, enjoy the legal capacity assigned to his master. A steward could not be prosecuted for wrongdoing but could be shamed or dismissed from his position. As Fitzmyer (1964, 35) notes:

> Incompetence, misuse of discretion, negligence and downright swindling were grounds for reprehension by the master and even for unilateral dismissal of the agent. But he could not be sued in court as a debtor.

Bailey (1976, 89–92) agrees with Derrett and Fitzmyer: the steward, an estate manager, is a paid agent with many ways to augment his income. As Bailey (1976, 90) puts it:

> A dishonest steward has many ways to cheat. Every time he buys or sells anything he will make a "cut." But all his extra profits are "off the record."

In addition, when the steward draws up rent contracts, he "will likely receive a little something 'under the table,' from most . . . renters," and he may receive some bonuses at harvest time or on other festive occasions. Such extras are the tenants' way of staying on the steward's good side. None of this activity appears on the account books; what is written there must be delivered to the master.

The steward belonged to the class of retainers who executed the will of the elites. In this case, the steward is highly placed in the household bureaucracy of a rich and powerful elite. The rich master is often absent due

to his endless pursuit of power and prestige, retaining what he has and fending off hostile attacks while at the same time accumulating more by launching hostile takeovers where feasible. The master counts on his steward to manage his estate and to realize a profit large enough to support his lifestyle and provide the resources needed to fuel his endless political struggle with other elites. The steward therefore occupies a powerful but vulnerable position. He is constantly susceptible to back-stabbing and calumny from disgruntled debtors or tenants. Of course, they would not complain to the master that the steward is too severe; the master would take that as a testimony to his steward's thoroughness (Gachter 1950, 126–29). Instead, they would accuse the steward. The verb *diaballō* means "to bring charges with hostile intent" and can imply "either falsely or slanderously" (BAGD 181; see also Moulton and Milligan 1930, 146–47). The steward is always caught in a cross fire between the master's greed and excessive demands, on the one hand, and the tenants' or debtors' endless complaints, on the other. What pleases one is certain to displease the other. The master will always keep a suspicious eye on his steward, and the tenants will continuously envy the steward's power over them. The steward's great asset is his literacy, in this case, an ability both to read and to write, a characteristic that sets him apart among retainers and gives him leverage. But no amount of leverage can change his basic situation; he serves at the whim of the master, who may at any time remove him from his position. Still, he has risen to a position of importance, and it has taken years of work to learn what it takes to succeed as a steward. He represents an investment to the master, who needs trustworthy stewards to keep his estates productive and profitable so that he can pursue an active role in the constant power struggles with other elites and with the ruler.

The parable introduces familiar social scripts and a well-known social scene. A distrustful master has heard anonymous rumors that his steward has been wasteful. The phrase "wasting/scattering his goods" probably refers to an alleged inefficient use of the master's property to make profits, because the failure to produce expected profits would constitute grounds for dismissal. The master would not be concerned about the steward's profits and "honest graft" as long as the steward produced the expected yield and kept the flow of goods and resources uninterrupted and strong. But any falloff of profits would be cause for alarm. Owing to the vagaries of weather, pests, soil condition, and dry farming, such fluctuations would

have been continuous, and each downturn presented an opportunity to back-stab and undermine the steward.

Bailey (1976, 97) and others have noted that the steward's silence before the master is a virtual confession of guilt. The hearer would expect the steward to launch a long and loud protestation of his innocence of the false charges. Against the background of this expectation, the steward's silence is deafening. Bernard Scott (1989, 261–62) believes that the peremptory nature of the judgment creates sympathy for the steward, who is not even given a chance "to explain his actions, to respond to his accusers, or even to know who his accusers are." But this sounds suspiciously like a retrojection of American jurisprudence and the Western sense of a fair trial onto the ancient world, in which neither was operative. In addition to suggesting that the steward's silence acknowledges the irrevocable nature of the master's judgment and the futility of reverting to the standard ploy, Bailey (1976, 94) is able to find a socially redeeming moral in the master's action. As a "noble character respected in the community," the master "cared enough about his own wealth to fire a wasteful manager," thereby inculcating the lesson about the values of frugality and honesty so dear to the heart of modern capitalists but so completely absent from the ancient world. Having imbued the master with the prescience and goodness of God, Bailey can conclude only that the steward, by his silence, is confessing the following facts:

1. "I am guilty";
2. "The master knows the truth; he knows that I am guilty";
3. "This master expects obedience; disobedience brings judgment"; and
4. "I cannot get my job back by offering a series of excuses."

There is another way to read the steward's behavior in the context of the economic system of which he is a part. He is familiar with back-stabbing and has probably survived a few episodes of witch-hunting to reach his present position. Given the master's frame of mind, he can see that it would be useless to fall into the familiar role by protesting his innocence. All that would do is confirm the master's hasty judgment. If he is to survive, he must develop a different strategy and employ different tactics. To the steward, the question of whether he is innocent or guilty is not even a consideration. Guilty of what? Taking too large a cut? Failing to achieve

usurious profit margins? Not covering his backside as well as he usually does?

Much of the comment on the parable assumes a simple moral code and judges the steward by it. Most of the sins ascribed to him are those that belong properly to a capitalistic framework. Cadoux's notion (1931, 133) of a "fraudulent misuse of a monetary trust," Oesterley's view (1936, 197) that the steward is "swindling his lord" by cheating and defrauding, A. N. Jannaris's view (1901/2, 129) that "the end justifies the means," Alexander Eagar's speculation (1895, 460) that the steward's knavery and foolery led to his inability to provide for himself "in accordance with the usual facts as to the improvidence of vice," and Fitzmyer's charge (1964, 31) that "he squandered his master's property" all miss the point. They assume an economic morality rooted in capitalistic ideology, and therefore the commentators all side with the master and blame the steward for cheating the master by participating in some first-century version of a savings and loan scandal. In fact, the steward was just doing his job, and the charges brought against him are just a normal part of the endless war between the landowners and the peasants. One thing is clear: the charges certainly do not implicate him as an indolent capitalist who has failed to maximize the master's profit, owing to his laziness and sloth, as Crossan (1973, 109–10) seems to assume in spite of his assurance that Jesus was not portraying "an example of fiscal and administrative responsibility" (1973, 104). At times, Crossan's reading of the parable sounds like a lament, decrying how hard it is to get good help.

What were the issues surrounding the steward's role? What was the nature of the contracts? Derrett (1961b, 205–15; 1972, 439–40) thinks that the issue is usury, a reading picked up in one form or another by Bailey (1976), Fitzmyer (1964), Donahue (1988), and Paul Gachter (1950), among others. Were the contracts usurious? According to the Torah, usury was expressly forbidden (Exod. 22:25–27; Lev. 25:36–38; Deut. 15:7–11; 23:19–20) because it was oppressive. As Jacob Neusner has noted, the Mishnah opposes not only usury but the taking of interest itself (Neusner 1990a; 1990b; 1992). But the pressures created by commercialization and monetization changed the nature of the economy of Palestine. Inevitably, the wealthy found ways to charge interest under other guises.

The most common tactic was to include the total amount of debt incurred in a single figure that included principal and interest (Derrett 1972, 438–40;

1961, 205–8). Instead of stating the debt in terms of amount borrowed and interest charged, the interest was subsumed under the single amount charged to the borrower. This amounted to taking interest but keeping it hidden in the contract. Derrett (1961b, 208) argues that charging interest in this fashion was “unobjectionable” as long as the borrower was not under necessity to borrow the money or goods in question. The hidden interest rates appear to have been about 25 percent for money and 50 percent for goods, such as wheat (Neusner 1990a, 43). Derrett (1961b, 213–16) thinks the situation with goods was more complicated. Goods were ranked in order of risk, and the greater the risk, the higher the interest rate charged on them. For example, jewels and precious metals were low-risk items, whereas oils, wines, sugar, and salt were higher-risk items, owing to the threat of adulteration. Accordingly, the rates of interest would increase from 25 percent, according to the risk rating of the goods.

The Pharisees countered these practices by inventing a category called the “dust of usury.” By using it, they intended to write contracts that avoided “even the ‘dust’, or facet or scintilla, of the biblical wrongdoing” (Derrett 1961b, 207). The Pharisees’ scruples about the “dust of usury” appear to represent an effort to counter the increasingly popular practice of taking hidden interest by appealing to the “original biblical prohibitions [that were] aimed to prevent exploitation” (Derrett 1961b, 207). But there was another devious route around the prohibition against usury, in spite of the fact that, for the framers of Mishnah, “the bias is against not only usury but interest” (Neusner 1990a, 43). One could count the difference between the amount lent and the amount received in payment of the loan as “increase,” not interest.

This background now must be applied to the contracts of the debtors in the parable.

The Debtors and Their Contracts

The discussion to this point has identified neither the debtors nor the nature of their contracts. Who are the debtors in the parable? The most commonly held view is that the debtors are peasant tenants or sharecroppers who till the soil in the master’s fields and maintain his orchards. Bailey (1976, 92) identifies three types of tenants: (1) a tenant who paid a percentage of the crop in rent, (2) a tenant who paid a fixed portion of the

crop in rent, (3) a tenant who paid a fixed rent in cash. The tenants in the parable belong to the first type. In one form or another, this is the scenario accepted by most commentators.

If this scenario is accepted, it allows a number of ways to read the parable. The first way can be traced to some brief comments made early in this century by M. D. Gibson (1902/3, 334), who suggested that the parable depicted a steward who was squeezing the master's tenants in order to make exorbitant profits, a custom that prevails "whenever Orientals are left to their own methods, uncontrolled by any protectorate of Europeans." She speculated that the steward in such a system might even demand for himself a portion equal to the debt paid the master. Much later, Derrett (1961b, 215–16) argued, based on practices in India, for interest rates of 100 percent and higher. In lowering the contracts, therefore, the steward was merely "renouncing his own exorbitant profits, without in any way defrauding the master." (Malina and Rohrbaugh [1992, 373–74] dispute the likelihood of this scenario.) This solution was elaborated by Gachter (1950, 122–31), who introduced the notion of gift and debt into the picture. In accepting the reduced contracts, the debtors were in effect accepting a gift from the steward, and in accepting his beneficence, they were indebting themselves to him and obligating themselves to reciprocate in appropriate ways.

More than any other commentator, Derrett (1961b) has attempted to reconstruct the parable along these lines by appealing to the Mishnaic materials on agency and usury. The contracts drawn by the steward were usurious because they included not only the amount of the original debt but also the hidden interest rate of 25 percent. True, the steward had covered himself well by masking the interest rate and writing into the contract only the debt owed, without separating that debt into its component parts (principal plus interest). In each case (vv. 5–7), the amount forgiven "corresponds to the amount of interest plus insurance. It is the amount which is oppressive and against the law of God" (Derrett 1961b, 214). The master has probably colluded with the steward in consenting to the contracts but remains untainted by them. If usury is charged, the steward/agent will be held responsible and the master presumed innocent. When faced with the stark fact that he will be displaced as steward, the steward makes a bid for acceptance by doing what the law of God requires and cancels the hidden usury in the contracts. Derrett (1961b, 216) sums it up concisely:

> On dismissal his duty towards his master faded before the practical necessity to recognize his duty towards God. He decided to obey the creator instead of his creature following the rabbinical maxim.

This position was subsequently entertained by Fitzmyer (1964; but not 1985, 1094–1102) and Donahue (1988, 165). Via (1967, 158–59) also gives consideration to Derrett's reconstruction but abandons it in favor of his own depiction of the steward as a picaresque rogue whose conversion to the law of God seems strained. In fact, the apparent conversion of the steward is a weak point in Derrett's interpretation. Why a creature of the economic system as shrewd as a steward should abandon his instincts and revert to piety is simply not explained.

Bailey offers a different account of the steward's actions. Although he has been put out of his stewardship, the steward knows that word has not gotten out, so he "summons" his master's debtors as if he were still in possession of his position. They respond because they believe that he is still the steward. Dealing with the debtors individually so that they cannot talk to one another until the deed is done, the steward announces that he has negotiated a reduction in their contracts. After all, the steward knows the many reasons why such a reduction might be warranted (drought, worms, insects, hot weather). He also takes credit for negotiating the reduction with the master. The steward then gathers the renegotiated contracts and presents them to the master, who realizes that he has been painted into a corner. The villagers have gathered and are celebrating the generosity of their master and patron. The master can either renounce the steward's actions and tell the debtors that their reduced contracts are invalid or quietly accept the villagers' praise and goodwill and play the role of the good patron. If he pursues the first course, he will have to contend with the anger and bitterness of his tenants, as well as their sense of betrayal. If he follows the second course, he will keep the steward and let the villagers rejoice. He chooses the second course (cf. also Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992, 375).

In keeping with his reconstruction, Bailey (1976, 106) views *phronimōs* as "nonmoral cleverness and skill deployed in self-preservation," although he concedes with Jeremias and Georg Bertram (*TDNT* 9:234) the word's eschatological echoes. But for Bailey, eschatological is more soteriological; it means that the steward recognizes the source of his salvation. Furthermore, in Bailey's scenario the steward reduces the master's profit,

not his own. This explanation is more likely the case because the steward changes the amounts written in the contracts (*grammata*), and whatever is written in the contract belongs to the master. The steward's honest graft and emoluments would be "off the record" and informal, although nonetheless real and enforceable. One of the weaknesses in Derrett's position is that he assumes that the steward wrote his own profits into the contract, but this would be most improbable, especially if they approached or equaled the amount claimed by the master, unless the master was the indolent and disinterested Oriental master conjured by Gachter (1950, 125). However, Gachter's figure seems more a figment of the Western imagination than an active elite in pursuit of power and privilege and very much interested in the productivity of his estates (cf. also Bailey 1976, 94).

Over and above the issues already mentioned, there are two further difficulties with this reconstruction of the parable as a scene from village life. The first concerns the amounts of indebtedness and the second concerns the apparent literacy of the debtors. The two concerns are intertwined. B. T. D. Smith (1937, 108) thinks that the debtors were merchants, not tenant farmers, in part because he views the *grammata* as IOUs, which would be easier to alter or falsify than tenant leases. Similarly, Manson (1949, 291) thinks that debtors are "persons who have purchased goods from the estate and have not yet paid for them." Further, any debtors literate enough to mark their accounts are not likely to be peasants. Jeremias (1963, 181; cf. also 1969, 31–35) notes that "heavy obligations were involved," thereby implying that the debtors could be "wholesale merchants, who have given promissory notes for goods received." Fitzmyer (1985, 1100–1101) also views the bonds as promissory notes or IOUs "of the *atokos* type," that is, the kind of loan in which the interest was not explicitly expressed although it was included in the debt owed.

What would it mean for the social scene of the parable if the debtors were what Jeremias calls "wholesale merchants," not tenants? The setting would not be a peasant village but either the master's estate or a nearby market town, most likely the latter. The estate manager would be in the market town to contract with merchants for the selling of the master's goods, in this case wheat and olive oil. In an agrarian society impacted by commercialization and monetization, elites faced a fundamental difficulty. They owned estates that were the source of their wealth, but those estates were geographically removed from market towns and urban centers.

Therefore, they had to gather their harvest from their estates and the villages they controlled into storage centers, most likely on their estates or in market towns, where their agents could negotiate with merchants for the monetization and transport or export of their goods. To realize the kind of profits they needed to support their social status, elites needed the cooperation of agents beyond their estates. Stewards could see that the contracts with tenants were written and that the harvest was gathered and stored, but they could not transport those crops or convert them into money. To accomplish those tasks, merchants were required.

Behind this reading of the parable is a model of the ancient world as a connected network of urban and associated rural areas. Goods flowed from outlying estates into market towns and from there to urban centers for storage, monetization, and export. The cities where the elites lived controlled the entire process (Lenski 1966, 189–296; Rohrbaugh 1991, 129–37). As commercialization invaded the traditional agrarian economy, it created more differentiated roles or "horizontal differentiation" among retainers. In this case, the roles of the steward and merchant reflect this differentiation. The steward negotiates with merchants for distribution rights to the master's crops. Whether they bid their contracts in advance of the harvest and pay earnest money to protect their option or accept the goods on consignment and seek to make the maximum profit they can with them is not at issue. Either case could be argued based on the parable. One thing is clear: their debt is stated in terms of goods (goods received or goods pledged), not in terms of a final amount of money. This provision is probably to ensure that the contract can accommodate the fluctuating price of commodities over the time of the contract. If the merchant-debtors have accepted in advance the amounts specified in their *grammata*, it is most likely that their contracts include a hidden interest rate somewhere between 25 and 50 percent. They will owe the landowner the price of the commodity plus the interest incorporated into the contract. Their profit will have to come on top of those obligations.

This scenario reflects a changing role for merchants in agrarian economies that were coming under the increasing influence of commercialization. Initially, the merchants were itinerant dealers in luxury items, catering to the tastes of elites. But as roles became more differentiated, merchants increased their repertoire of entrepreneurial roles by becoming wholesalers and transporters of the goods produced on the

estates of elites. In this way, they accepted much of the risk of transporting goods and paid the numerous tolls and new taxes levied on them by the very elites whose interests they were serving. The important point to note here is that elites shifted "to the merchants part of the responsibility for extracting the economic surplus from the common people" (Lenski 1966, 252). The merchants were satisfied with their new role as long as the elites kept their exploitation of merchants at an acceptable level. As Gerhard Lenski (1966, 253) notes, "In the end, a political elite always had to weigh its desire for the merchants' wealth against its need for their services."

The parable, then, depicts a steward of a large estate who is responsible for negotiating contracts for the annual yields of the master's fields and orchards. The amounts involved suggest a large estate. The harvest is so great that the steward cannot transport the goods and sell them but must negotiate with merchants to fulfill those increasingly specialized responsibilities. Of course, the merchants involved in transactions of this magnitude are literate and able to negotiate contracts and renegotiate them as necessary. They can read and write, just like the steward. At this level of transaction, written contracts have replaced oral agreements. The hostile rumors about the steward's malfeasance may have been initiated by either the merchants with whom he deals or the peasants of the villages. Perhaps the merchants believe that they are not receiving the volume of goods they anticipated, and they conclude that the steward is taking a cut large enough adversely to affect their profits. Perhaps the villagers think that they are left with too little after the steward has appropriated the master's portion of the harvest and included his own cut as well. Like most peasants, they focus on what is left rather than on how much is taken. In the complex process of negotiating contracts with tenants and contracts with merchants, the steward has ample opportunity to take his cut. Such a system has few rules and plenty of room for discretionary activity. The steward always has enough rope to hang himself.

The rich man is both the steward's patron and his suspicious overlord. He has trained the steward and invested in him, and he has placed him in a role with the fiduciary responsibility of a client to a patron. The rich man expects that the steward will take his honest graft, but he does not care as long as the steward does his job, produces the expected profits, and keeps the peasants under control. The steward always has to balance his greed against its consequences. He will do well, but he cannot become

conspicuous in his consumption. One possible meaning of the verb *diaskorpizōn*, translated as "wasting," is "scattering," or "dispersing" (BAGD 188). The same verb appears in Luke 15:13, where it is used to describe the prodigal son's life of conspicuous consumption. Thus the steward may have indulged in forms of status display and conspicuous consumption inappropriate to his social standing. If he had been accumulating too much and spending it in ways that caused a stir, he could have set himself up for his fall. To engage in this behavior is to dishonor his patron by taking advantage of his position and competing with the master rather than acknowledging his own subservient and dependent position.

If the rich man is Jewish, he has an image problem. He needs to appear pious and Torah-obedient while pursuing the accumulation of the resources required for his class role and political ambitions. Hence his client steward plays a key role, because the steward writes the usurious contracts with the hidden interest rates. If the contracts were to be declared usurious, the steward would be declared guilty, not the master. In the complex situation created by the conflict between the demands of the Torah and the pressures of commercialization on the economy, the master could usually escape notice and collect his hidden interest, knowing that the steward would take the fall. Therefore, the *plousios* would not be anxious to dismiss a trusted and tested steward.

Codifying the Weapons of the Weak

Most studies of peasant resistance to oppression have focused on peasant revolts and wars. But in a recent work, James Scott (1985, 29) has studied the "everyday forms of peasant resistance," whose weapons include "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson [and] sabotage." These weapons are employed in the daily struggle between landowners and peasants over issues of labor and forced labor (corvée), taxes, rents, loans, and interest. Because they are virtually powerless, peasants must find ways of resisting their oppressors that do not subject them to the jeopardy of open revolt. Therefore, they turn to forms of "passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion and deception." In the village context, peasants had little access to the systemic factors that dominated their lives because they could do very little about them, so they

tended to focus on people who were within their reach, such as the steward or estate manager.

The hostile charges brought against the steward need to be seen in this context. They are not moral charges that cast a shadow over the character of the steward but tactics in the endless resistance that is part of everyday life in agrarian societies. The charges are brought to sabotage the steward, undermine his authority, and place the villagers or merchants in a stronger bargaining position. If the villagers or merchants manage to oust the steward, his successor will have to reckon with their success and proceed cautiously. If they fail, they will still have made their point by compromising the steward and instilling the fear of failure in him. This understanding explains why so much of the commentary on the parable is beside the point. There is no monolithic moral system to which everyone consents and by which everyone is judged. The entire system of which the steward is a part is exploitive and predatory. The steward represents the interests of a greedy and oppressive elite; the peasants are struggling to hold onto every bit of subsistence they can. The daily life of peasants consists of continual episodes of haggling and bargaining to keep what little they have and to get a little more. In this constant warfare, the steward represents the master, negotiates the master's interests, and takes his own cut and lives with the hostility that results from doing his job.

James Scott (1985, 25–27) differentiates between the "onstage" public life of the village and its "offstage" or "backstage" existence. The elites and their retainers control the onstage life of the village but cannot penetrate its offstage world, where the rituals of deference and the symbolic compliance of the peasants are put aside. Backstage is where "gossip, tales, slander, and anonymous sabotage mocks and negates the public ritual order," and this is where "elite control [does] fall away." The attack on the steward has come from offstage. It is anonymous slander or gossip, intended to put the steward on the defensive, knock his feet out from under him, throw him off balance, and create suspicion between him and his master. The moral content of the charge is irrelevant because no single morality governs the village. Each group operates out of its own morality and code of honor and shame. The moral economy of the peasants views the master as exploitive and ruthless; the master's code treats peasants as resources to be squeezed to the limit; the steward's code is to survive while making a profit large enough to secure a lucrative honest graft, yet small enough to avoid

attracting the master’s attention and reasonable enough to gain the peasants’ consent. When the villagers are unhappy with the steward, they attack him anonymously through rumor, gossip, and back-stabbing. Although their circumstances differ, merchants would use the same weapons.

The parable alludes to this backstage activity before returning attention to the onstage encounter between the master and the steward. It is a scene of peremptory judgment. Onstage, the elites are in control. The steward knows the rules of the game and pays appropriate deference to the master. True, he avoids the elaborate display protesting his innocence that seems to be expected, not because he is guilty of the charges but because he has discerned in the master’s voice and demeanor a clear signal that such a display would be useless. For whatever reasons, the master has sided with the villagers or merchants. The steward recognizes that his onstage behavior will have no useful effects, so he turns his attention to offstage strategies and tactics. He appears to be complying with the master’s demand that he turn in the account books of his stewardship, but it is a symbolic compliance that depends on his feigned ignorance of the master’s judgment and perhaps the feigned ignorance of the debtors as well. The parable ends onstage with the master’s commendation. Using James Scott’s categories, the scenes of the parable can be classified as follows:

16:1	offstage
16:2	onstage
16:3–7	backstage
16:8a	onstage

To this point, the reading has assumed a village setting, but how would it change if the setting were switched to the master’s estate or a market town where merchants, instead of peasant villagers, played the adversarial role? The dynamics would remain much the same because, in agrarian societies, all nonelite groups were disadvantaged by comparison to their rulers and resorted to many of the same strategies and tactics. Like the villagers, the merchants form a distinctive group with its own ethic, ethos, and interests. Merchants were despised by elites because of their concern with money and relative freedom from political control. Because they were market-oriented, they were not easily controlled, yet they were needed because they also supplied the luxury items that fueled the intraelite social struggles and

provided needed transportation of goods. They had no allies in stewards or other retainers, who represented the elites and competed with the merchants for their share of the so-called surplus extracted from the peasants but not confiscated by the elites. Therefore, merchants no less than peasant villagers would have reasons for using the same weapons of the weak to undercut the steward and impair his bargaining position. They would have their informal channels through which to get rumors, gossip, and slander to the ears of rich landowners. Though their motives would be different, their methods would be much the same.

The steward recognizes his adversaries' tactics when he sees them, and once he has seen the master, he knows that no onstage countermeasures will work. He has to go backstage to counteract his opponents' offensive. As his soliloquy makes clear (v. 3), the stakes are high. Hence he "summons" the merchant debtors as if he were still authorized to act on his master's behalf, and whether through feigned or genuine ignorance, they accept his ruse. But he gives them no chance to confer or consult with one another. He deals with them quickly, one at a time.

He reduces the contracts held by the debtors. Assuming a Jewish setting, the reductions represent the difference between the ostensible value of the contract and the hidden interest contained in it. The hidden interest on oil is 50 percent because oil is a commodity susceptible to adulteration and therefore less secure. The interest rate on wheat is lower (20 percent) because the commodity is easier to assess. All of this represents a loss to the master because the steward has withdrawn the hidden interest written into the contracts, for which he alone is responsible even though such interest benefits the master. The steward is not removing his own exorbitant profits. They would never be written into the contract but taken off the record. In effect, he is "scattering" (*diaskorpizōn*) the master's goods (*ta hyparchonta*), just as he has been accused of doing (v. 1), by dispersing the hidden interest in the contracts to the debtors (whether they be peasant tenants or wholesale merchants).

Whether in the village or market town, the peasants or merchants have begun to confer and have discovered their good fortune, which no doubt the steward took credit for arranging. They have indebted themselves to the steward in accepting the reduced contracts and, offstage, will be obligated to repay the favor, but onstage they will praise the honor of their glorious patron and benefactor, the master. The master can either accept their praise

and retain the steward or cancel the renegotiated contracts and make a martyr of the steward. To pursue the latter course would blacken the master's reputation among either the merchants with whom he works or the villagers whose compliance he must ensure. Even without the hidden interest rates, the master will make an exorbitant profit from his lands. The lost hidden interest can be recouped in other ways; elites are never at a loss for ways to extract surpluses. It is better for him to retain his steward and accept the praise of the peasants or merchants. Besides, in accepting the reductions in their contracts, the merchants or peasants have most obviously and clearly indebted themselves to the master. In accepting this unexpected largesse, they have also placed themselves in the position of clients to a generous patron. But no patronage comes without strings attached; they will have to reciprocate in one way or another.

Why, then, did the steward's actions gain the master's commendation for "shrewdness" (*phronimōs*)? First, this reading does not assume that the steward was trying to ingratiate himself with either peasants or merchants. Both of those groups would exult in his fall and offer poor prospects for patronage. As Cadoux (1931, 134) noted long ago, all that the steward's actions could possibly do would be to secure "a temporary postponement of destitution . . . for hospitality so gained does not last long." More to the point, peasants would be unlikely to supply hospitality because they were clannish and tightly loyal to their village. It would be improbable that they would welcome this former enemy into their circle. Peasants also had very little beyond their subsistence needs, and what they did put in their ceremonial fund was not to support oppressive stewards thrown out of jobs, especially as a result of their own silent campaign of slander against such stewards. In light of these reasons, Gachter's judgment (1950, 128) that the debtors were tenants because they would be more likely to show mercy than merchants has little to commend it. Merchants would make little better candidates for hospitality. They were in competition with stewards for the same resources, and if they were the source of the calumnious campaign to eliminate the steward, it seems improbable that, having achieved their goal, they would then reverse their course of action and extend hospitality to him. Even if the steward tried desperately to act like a patron by reducing their contracts, his ruse would be exposed when he was deposed from his stewardship. The merchants would see him then for what he was, not a

patron to whom they owed favors but a destitute beggar to whom they owed nothing.

This line of argument suggests that the goal of the steward's actions was either to retain his stewardship or to indicate to other great "homes" (v. 4) why he was a valuable steward. The steward has no future through an alliance with either merchants or peasants. As Bailey (1976, 98) recognized, "The status of the perpetual guest is intolerable. . . . That he wants and needs another job is evidenced by his considering digging and begging" (cf. Sir. 29:21–28; 40:28–30). Given his skills and experience, the steward would be hired only by elites. He belongs to the retainer class, and his prospects of employment rest with the ruling class that created the retainers and utilizes their services.

How, then, did his backstage machinations serve the purpose of ensuring his employment by elites? The first thing they did was to expose his anonymous enemies. By accepting the reductions in their contracts, the very debtors who had accused the steward of "scattering" the master's resources revealed how willing they were to do the very thing they had accused the steward of doing. It is as if the steward, by his actions, says to his master, "If you want to know who is really scattering your goods, take a look at the actions of your debtors." But his actions serve another purpose as well: they remind the master who is responsible for writing contracts with hidden interest and who takes the fall if they are found to be usurious. The reductions in the contracts were meant to send a message to the master. In this reading, the reductions are not hastily made cuts across the board (cf., for example, Jeremias 1963, 181) but intentional reductions of each contract by the amount of the hidden interest (Derrett 1961b, 205–16). By this move, the steward reminds the master just who has been taking chances to accumulate his wealth, including the questionable practice of charging de facto interest in spite of the prohibitions of the Torah and oral torah. To preserve his social status, the master needs a steward who is willing to engage in these kinds of practices. This the steward has done. Whatever faults he may have do not include indolence in looking after the master's concerns. By his actions, therefore, the steward reminds the master of his value.

Finally, the steward displays his resourcefulness to the master. The debtors think that they have received a generous dividend from their master/patron, and in their joy, they overlook the obligation they have taken

upon themselves. When the patron gives, he also indebts. By signing their revised *grammata* with the reduced amounts, the debtors have also signed a new contract with a different kind of hidden interest, and they will pay for their good fortune. Clients always do. The steward has not cheated the master; he has placed new cards in the master's hand. Seeing the steward's strategy and tactics, the master commends him for his shrewdness. The master has taken a short-term loss and has been reminded of the value of the steward, but he will realize long-term gains.

Little wonder that the master "commended the steward of unrighteousness for operating shrewdly" (author's translation). The praise is in keeping with the master and forms a fitting conclusion to the parable. The steward belongs to the system of injustice (*adikia*) and has never left it; he has no intention of giving up and dropping out just because another anonymous enemy has launched a campaign to remove him. The master, who belongs to the same system of exploitation, recognizes a gifted steward when he sees one. His commendation is akin to the "Well done, good and trustworthy slave" of the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30). To evaluate the commendation, one must know who is commending whom.

One other factor must be considered before this reading of the parable is complete. In an interpretation of this parable proposed nearly a decade ago (Herzog 1984, 23–25), I noted that the parable began with the usual social scripts: masters distrust stewards; peasants hate stewards; stewards cheat both tenants and masters. But by means of his outrageous actions, the steward manages to reverse all of these scripts so that, at the close of the parable, peasants are praising the master, the master commends the steward, and the steward has relieved the burden on the peasants and kept his job. At that time, I used the work of Victor Turner (1969; 1974) to interpret the ending of the parable as an example of *communitas*. As Turner (1969, 126–27) defined it, "Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority." The scene implied by the end of the parable seemed to depict a moment of true *communitas*, created by the intersection of the marginality of the steward, the inferiority of the debtors, and the liminality of the master's commendation.

In a brief note on a sermon by Karl Barth, William Boyd (1938/39, 46) summarized the theologian's interpretation of the parable: out of this "sad story of wrong-doing" came something that "looks almost like a piece of

the kingdom of heaven" because the steward "had scored off all the debts of the master's tenants, wiped out their obligations [and] relieved them of their burdens." In other words, the steward acted as if the "distinction between thine and mine no longer existed." This was nothing less than a prophecy of the post-Pentecostal course of the early church, whose members held all things in common, and "a practical illustration of the carrying out of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount." Clearly, Barth still read the steward's actions as an example of "wrongdoing" and seems to side with the master, and he accepted Luke's ideal portrayal of the early church; but Barth intuited the significance of the ending of the parable. Derrett (1961b) may have been closer to the ethos of Jesus when he identified the meaning of the steward's action in terms of the issue of usury and the cancellation of hidden interest. Clearly, the issue at the end of the parable is the cancellation or reduction of debt. The twisted machinations of debtors and desperate scheming of the steward led to a lowering of debt to which the master, for whatever reasons, consented. The result was a glimpse for the debtors of another order, one in which forgiveness of debt would be more than a petition in a prayer.

Conclusion

Faced with a limit situation, the steward devised limit acts that changed the scenario from a sorry and predictable tale of woe to a scene of rejoicing. The master who held all the cards lost the hand. The weapons of the weak employed by the debtors were matched with an arsenal of equal strength by the steward, whose weakness was also exposed. Out of the battle came a temporary respite for the debtors, a glimpse of a time when debts would be lowered, and a place where rejoicing could be heard. This may not be a parable of the reign of God, but it suggests how the weapons of the weak can produce results in a world dominated by the strong.

14

Concluding Remarks

This study has proceeded in the manner of an experiment. The terms of the experiment and the methods by which it would proceed were set out in part 1. The framework of this experiment has fit well with Paulo Freire's understanding of "problem-posing" education. This study has proposed a way of reading the parables and has struggled with the problems that this approach raises. If Jesus' parables originally functioned in a manner similar to that of codifications in Freire's pedagogy, then they were not meant to be stories with either a clear moral or a single meaning that could be gleaned by reading them correctly. Rather, they were meant to be discussion-starters, whose purpose was to raise questions and pose dilemmas for their hearers. They were open-ended stories that invited their hearers to enter into conversation for the purposes of exploring the social scenes they presented and connecting the hearers to the realities of their lives and the larger systemic realities in which they were caught.

This is one reason why the discussions of specific parables in parts 2 and 3 remain as open-ended as they do. The "conclusions" are often minimal and may be unsatisfactory for many readers. The discussions of the parables did attempt to connect the parables' social scenes to the larger social, political, economic, and ideological dimensions of the "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1967) in which those scenes were set and, in this way, sought to connect the surface structures of the parables with the deep structures the parables implied, or to say it differently, to move from description to analysis.

It needs to be clear that this approach to the parables neither exhausts their meaning nor offers a new proposal about their "original" meaning as parables of Jesus. It would be more accurate to say that this experiment indicates what kinds of readings result from the assumptions made and the information used in this inquiry. It is hoped that these interpretations are interesting enough to provoke the kind of fruitful discussion that will measure these readings' usefulness and limitations. Like many other studies of the parables, this inquiry has raised more questions than it has answered, but that is the nature of most disciplined interpretive work and that is the nature of problem-posing education.

Parables, Ordinary Life, and Extraordinary Moments

Like Freire's codifications, the parables often begin with everyday events from the lives of those who listened to them, such as the hiring and paying of day laborers; contracting with tenants to tend a vineyard; providing hospitality for a visitor to a small village; settling an estate claimed by a widow; and the conflicts between steward, merchants, and absentee landlord. None of this should sound surprising to anyone who has followed the history of the interpretation of the parables. From Adolf Julicher onward, interpreters have been convinced that the parables presented scenes from everyday life. The most common reason offered for telling stories in this way was that it showed the intimate connection between the reign of God and everyday life.

This study has proposed a different way of reading the same information. It is only through the presentation of common scenes that the parable as codification could begin with the experience of its hearers. But the parables could also depict scenes of the great household bureaucracies and even venture into the royal court itself for the purpose of observing how retainers pursued their investment strategies and how the hope vested in popular kingship might prove illusory. One parable even carried its listeners to the courtyard of the Temple at the hour of the afternoon sacrifice. The parables that presented scenes that were not part of everyday life, such as those set in elite households, the royal court, or the Temple, nevertheless involved institutions that impacted the daily life of the listeners. Peasants might never have been part of a household bureaucracy or journeyed to the royal

court, but they had developed their own ideas about how these institutions worked. Just as peasants and other rural villagers became urban persons by virtue of the impact that cities had on their rural villages, they were also political creatures who knew how elite households and royal courts affected their lives. For the purposes of social analysis, it was important to include in the parables the centers of power as well as the periphery among the topics of conversation.

As Freire knew, the danger of beginning with daily life or with dominating institutions was that the peasants had internalized the world of their oppressors and had settled for the reading of the world and its ways offered by their elite rulers. Therefore, the codification had to jar its hearers out of their almost instinctive acquiescence to the rulers' reading of reality. This need accounts for another characteristic commonly noted in the parables: they not only present ordinary life but contain extraordinary departures from it. Thus, for example, a lofty elite goes to the marketplace to hire day laborers; a lowly day laborer challenges a member of the ruling class; Lazarus ends up in Abraham's bosom while the rich man burns in Hades; violence breaks out unaccountably and unexpectedly in the vineyard; a royal act of forgiveness of debt leads to the torturer's dungeon, not to the reign of God; a highly placed retainer buries a talent rather than invests it; a widow beats the system and gets justice; and a steward, with the deck stacked against him, wins the hand, even though the master held all the cards.

Scholars have proposed many reasons why the parables contain these twists and turns. Usually, their reasons revolve around the assumption that the parables communicate the incongruity between life on earth and life in the reign of God. This study suggests a different reason for these gaps: the departures trigger the problem-posing questions that begin to explore the scene presented in the parable by holding the scene up as an object for contemplation and analysis.

At this point, the study given here faced a significant difficulty. It had proposed that parables were discussion-starters. They were used to invite conversation and to lure their hearers into the process of decoding and problematizing their world. But there are no records of the conversations that they generated. No one was around to write a verbatim account. Over time, after the parables were detached from their settings and conversational contexts, they became example stories and riddles whose answers were

inserted into them by the theologorical work of the evangelists. How was it possible to suggest here, from a modern point of view, the kinds of conversations that the parables might have generated? The procedure followed here was to set the parables in the context of agrarian societies and aristocratic empires, so that their microscenes could be related to the macroscenario in which they were told. This was one way to reconstruct for the modern reader what the crowd to whom Jesus spoke knew experientially and intuitively. The hope here is that the labor involved in placing the parables in these contexts will serve as a modern counterpart to that original conversation, though a distant and risky one, to be sure. The movement from the parable to the larger systemic realities suggested by it is parallel to the move from the surface to the deep structure of which Freire has spoken when explaining the nature of a codification. This results in decoding the parable and problematizing the scene it depicts.

The parables in part 2 are roughly equivalent to what Freire has called "first-level codifications." They explore the world of oppression and the ways it works. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard problematizes the relationship between wages and work; the parable of the wicked tenants problematizes the issues of land tenure, ownership, and inheritance in the context of the spiral of violence and aggression; the parable of the rich man and Lazarus problematizes the relationship between earthly status and kinship with Abraham; the parable of the unmerciful servant problematizes the hidden contradictions in popular messianic hopes; and the parable of the talents problematizes the dilemma of whistle-blowing retainers. At a deeper level, a number of the parables problematize the relationship between the debt code and the purity codes of the Torah as they were worked out in daily life. The range in the parables studied is remarkable. They explore the bureaucracies of the royal court and the great households; the threshold in the downward spiral of peasants, when smallholders who are becoming tenants violently resist their decline; the cutthroat world of upper-level and middle-level bureaucrats; the desperation of day laborers; and the final days of a beggar's life. They are set in a variety of locations encompassing the major institutions of the day—royal court, Temple courtyard, elite household—and they gather into their purview a number of related political and economic activities: toll collection, viticulture, land tenure, and the relations surrounding production.

The parables in part 3 correlate roughly with what Freire called “second-level codifications,” which probe limit situations and pose limit actions that can change the nature of those situations. It is one thing to begin to analyze the systems of oppression and quite another to imagine how they can be changed. The four parables studied in part 3 present characters who do not accept their fate but act to change it: a toll collector claims the value of the rituals of the redemptive media for the outcast and receives justification; a villager refuses to hoard and extends hospitality; a widow breaks the culture of silence and demands justice at the gate; a steward refuses to become a statistic and outsmarts his master. These parables codify village life, the court system associated with the Torah, and the relations of an increasingly commercialized agrarian economy. They explore such issues as the moral economy of the peasant, the search for justice in the Torah and the abuses of the Torah, and the roles of retainers and merchants in the local economy. These parables end on a different note from the parables in part 2. In the Temple courtyard, the toll collector receives justification; in the village, the friend rises to contribute to the meal for an unexpected guest; at the gate, the widow receives a favorable verdict; in the market town, the steward sets off a celebration by his ingenious redistribution of wealth. The parables in part 2 end on more somber notes: the banishment of the day laborer who challenged the vineyard owner; the crushing of the peasant revolt; the failure of the pedagogy of the oppressor; the torturing of the unmerciful servant; and the banning of the one talent retainer to the outer darkness, where he will cry in anguish and shiver in the cold.

In light of these results, it could be argued that the parables in parts 2 and 3 of the present study correlate with Dan Via’s notion of the tragic (1967, chap. 4) and comic (1967, chap. 5) parables. Even a brief scan of the parables Via has placed in each category would seem to indicate some similarity in result between his approach and the one taken here. The parables that appear in both his study and this one are arranged as follows (numbers in parentheses indicate the part in this study in which the parable is located):

Tragic Parables *(Via 1967, chap. 4)*	*Comic Parables* *(Via 1967, chap. 5)*
The Talents (2)	Workers in the Vineyard (2)

Wicked Tenants (2)	The Unjust Steward (3)
Unmerciful Servant (2)	

The results seem to show similarity but actually mask a greater disparity. Via's sense of the tragic appears to cohere with the first-level codifications in part 2, although the actual interpretations offered in each case are entirely different. One reason for the disparity is that Via looks for the tragic flaw in the individual characters who appear in the tragic parables. However, unlike others who work with classical tragic theory, he does not trace the characters' downfall to fate or some other impersonal force as might be expected. This approach might offer the possibility of rapprochement with the systemic analyses offered here. Via also does not identify hubris or other internal forces as the cause of the fall of the tragic figures who inhabit the parables. Instead, he chooses to locate the cause of their fall in the actions of other characters who judge the actions of the tragic figures to be "wrong or evil" and who have "the power to dispose of [them] and personally [react] to do so" (Via 1967, 112). As long as the actor who disposes of the tragic character is a surrogate for God, the parable exposes the inauthentic existence of the fallen figure. In this study, however, the figure with the power to dispose is interpreted as a ruling elite, so that the source of tragedy is viewed in fundamentally different terms. The list of comic parables provides a truer indication of the disparity between Via's study and this one.

It must be said that Jesus was conducting neither a literacy campaign for educational reform nor a political campaign for democratic reform. His concerns were rooted in the Torah and its use to control the lives of the people of the land, especially as that Torah had become a tool in the hands of the Temple, the Jerusalem ruling elites, and the Herodian client rulers. By contrast, Jesus proposed a prophetic reading of the Torah that critiqued injustice and appealed to another order, the reign of God. The parables were part of that larger strategy, which included a prophetic critique of the systems of oppression and of the ruling class (part 2) and proposals for prophetic action (part 3).

Implications for Contemporary Ministry

Like most studies of the parables, this one also has a contemporary agenda. It was not meant to be rarefied research accessible only to the academy but is intended for the church. In light of this basic purpose, it seems appropriate to conclude with a few comments about this study's possible implications for ministry today. These comments will make the theological and pastoral agenda, conceived herein a bit clearer.

One clear implication of this study is that Jesus' ministry was concerned with political and economic issues. Matters of justice were not peripheral to a spiritual gospel but were at the heart of his proclamation and practice. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that justice was at the center of Jesus' spirituality. It is a conceit of the North American church that Jesus was not involved in politics and economics but limited himself to spiritual matters. Although this view may allow some the luxury of limiting ministry to so-called spiritual needs, it violates the fundamental practice of Jesus. To put it a bit differently, this study has argued that Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God, including its attendant theology and ethics, grew out of his social analysis. He did not proclaim the reign of God in a vacuum or teach theology and ethics devoid of social context. From time to time in this study, it has been clear that scholars have had difficulty dealing with the economic dimensions of parables such as that of the rich man and Lazarus. Standing face to face with Jesus' prophetic critique of greedy elites, many modern interpreters have vainly tried to spiritualize his message and avoid its penetrating gaze. But this will not do.

After they have been examined in light of what is known about advanced agrarian societies and commercializing aristocratic empires, the social scenes presented in many parables simply will not carry the theological weight placed on them. The discrepancies between these social scenes and the spiritual messages assigned to them reveal a host of problems ranging from incongruities to hidden contradictions. These problems are simply too great to be ignored. There are, no doubt, other ways to handle these discrepancies, but this study has chosen to treat them as clues to a different reading of the parables. In pursuing this course, this inquiry has been able to make sense out of some of the thorny problems that have plagued earlier theological readings of the parables but, in the process of resolving those issues, has raised others in their place. The issue facing most interpreters of the parables is deciding with which set of problems one wants to live.

All of this seems to have some implications for the way we do theology and ministry in our context. Just as it is possible to interpret the parables without regard for their social scenes, it is also possible to conduct ministry without regard for its social context. Doing so can lead to a discrepancy between theology and ministry as great as the discrepancy between a parable and its interpretation. Theology needs to grow out of social, political, and economic analysis, lest it become theology in a vacuum. Just as it is possible to jump to theological conclusions without pausing to survey the social, political, and economic landscapes in the parables, it is equally possible to proclaim a theology isolated from its world and ignorant of its context. Taking a cue from Jesus' practice, as implied by these readings of the parables, means accepting the necessity of integrating social analysis and theologizing.

If the parables originally functioned in the manner suggested by this study, they also today carry some implications for how we teach and learn theology and the Bible in the church. The parables have most often been interpreted as brief sermons. They proclaimed a message, and it was the hearers' responsibility to get it and get it right. But the Freirean approach advocated here interprets the parable as a codification. It is not a monologue to be heard and accepted but an invitation to conversation and communal reflection. The secret of the parable understood as a riddle was in its perplexing code; the secret of the parable as codification lies in the interaction between parable and community. In this context, the parable is engaging and inviting, and its message is discovered and created by the discourse of the community that interacts with it. Because parables need to grow out of the world of the parabler, the study of Jesus' parables becomes a prelude to a larger task. We must learn to tell new parables that codify and problematize our world as well as Jesus told parables for his world.

The anchoring of parables in everyday life indicates one arena for beginning reflection. This kind of theologizing begins not with the mysteries of God but with the perplexities of daily life. If we could master the art of codifying our daily lives as effectively as Jesus encoded his context, we would have rich materials on which to build our common theological and ethical reflection. The codification is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It enables a people so caught up in their context that they hardly see it to step back and gain perspective. As this occurs, social

analysis and theological reflection emerge as distinct yet related moments in a dialectical and dialogical process.

When this occurs, the people of God could discover a different kind of spirituality not confined to an ethereal realm beyond space and time but rooted in and growing out of their historical and social context. Justice and justification, righteousness and right relations, gospel and social gospel, social analysis and spiritual reflection are dimensions of a single whole, not antithetical opposites. The discussions of the parable-codifications studied here have demonstrated how integral such codifications can be.

Placed in this perspective, the parables not only disclose previously unexamined dimensions of Jesus' ministry but may hold clues to our own ministry as well. If this study has contributed in a small way to clarifying that relationship, it will have served a useful purpose.

List of Abbreviations

AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase.
Ant.	Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (LCL)
BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2d ed.
Bib	*Biblica*
BibTrans	*The Bible Translator*
BibZeit	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly—Monograph Series
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad novum testamentum (*The Jewish People in the First Century*), ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern.
ET	English Translation
Exp	*The Expositor*
ExpT	*Expository Times*
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
HomPastRev	*Homiletic and Pastoral Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*

ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick.
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAS	*Journal of Asian Studies*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JEvThSoc	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JPS	*Journal of Peasant Studies*
JRE	*Journal of Religious Ethics*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JThSoAfrica	*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint
NICGNT	*New International Commentary on the Greek New Testament*
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PacThRev	*Pacific Theological Review*
par(s).	parallel(s)
RestQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RevBib	*Revue biblique*
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
StudEv	*Studia Evangelica*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel.
ThStud	*Theological Studies*
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
var.	variant

War	Josephus, *The Jewish War* (LCL)
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Notes

Chapter 1. The Parables of Jesus, the Reign of God, and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

1. A word about language: I mostly use the phrase “reign of God” in preference to “kingdom of God” throughout this book. In addition to the benefit of inclusivity, the phrase conveys the dynamic sense of God’s acting in the world. There are times when I retain the phrase “kingdom of God” simply because it is so familiar.

2. I use the words “idealist” and “materialist” to refer to readings that center in the ideas generated by the parable as opposed to those that center in the social, political, and economic conditions presented in the parable. For an example of a materialist reading of biblical texts, see Belo (1981).

3. I often use the term “public work” rather than “ministry” to avoid the anachronism implied by the latter term. But, owing to its familiarity, I also use “ministry” when it seems appropriate to the context of the discussion.

4. Although Freire used the same approach in his work with both urban workers and peasants, I emphasize his work with peasants to draw the parallels with the peasants and assorted rural types with whom Jesus worked.

Chapter 3. Interpretive Strategies for Reading the Parables

1. For an introduction to redaction criticism, see Norman Perrin (1969); and for some examples of redaction criticism in practice, see Bornkamm, Barth, and Held (1963); Carlston (1975); Conzelmann (1960); Gundry (1982); Marxsen (1969); Rohde (1969).

2. Examples can be found throughout the work of Cadoux (1931), Dodd (1935), Oesterley (1936), Smith (1937), Manson (1949), and Jeremias (1963).

3. For an introduction to form criticism and its evolution, see Bailey (1991), Dibelius (n.d.), Guttgemanns (1979), McKnight (1969), Theissen (1983).

Chapter 4. The World of Agrarian Societies and Traditional Aristocratic Empires

1. This section is heavily indebted to the following works: Lenski and Lenski (1982), Lenski (1966), Eisenstadt (1963), Carney (1975).

2. I use four terms interchangeably: ruling class, elites, urban elites, and the aristocracy. Lenski (1966) prefers the first term; Kautsky (1982), the third. But the terms all refer to the same group.

3. Bureaucracies were staffed by a group Lenski (1966, 243–48, 256–66) calls the “retainer” class. Elsewhere these same functionaries are called bureaucrats (Kautsky 1982; Eisenstadt 1963). I use the words “retainers” and “bureaucrats” interchangeably.

4. For a visual representation of the class distribution of agrarian society, see Lenski (1966, 284).

5. This section is heavily indebted to Kautsky (1982) and Eisenstadt (1958; 1963).

Chapter 5. Blaming the Victims of Oppression: The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16)

1. See Horsley and Hanson (1985, 48–87), Horsley (1987, 1–58), and Hobsbawm (1959; 1981), for descriptions of social banditry.

2. See James C. Scott (1976, 13–34) for a description of “the moral economy” governing peasant behavior. To some degree, the day laborers have already fallen below the subsistence level, but even in such extremes they retain the instinctive values that motivate them (or at least “one of them”) to fight to retain their honor.

Chapter 6. Peasant Revolt and the Spiral of Violence: The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1–12)

1. As early as 1920–21, Arthur Gray argued that the parable was a condemnation of the scribes for their implication (cf. Mark 9:13) in the death of John the Baptist, the “beloved son” of the parable, an argument more recently taken up by Milavec (1989). Newell and Newell (1972, 226–37) read the parable as an antizealot polemic; Crossan (1971, 451–65; 1973, 86–96) argues that the parable depicts an opportunistic murder, “a graphic (actual?) example of prudent grasping of one’s immoral chance,” though to what end he does not speculate.

2. A number of commentators have attempted to describe how or why the tenants could lay claim to the vineyard—Dodd (1935, 125–27), Jeremias (1963, 75), Nineham (1963, 312), Derrett, (1970, 287–304), Newell and Newell (1972, 235–36). See Carlston (1975, 84) for a refutation of these claims.

3. This position is echoed almost without exception in the literature on the parable. See, for example, approaches as diverse as those of Johnson (1960), Jeremias (1963), Taylor (1966), Via (1967), Schweizer (1970), and Stern (1989).

Chapter 7. The Unbridgeable Chasm: The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31)

1. This basic approach to the parable can be illustrated by citing numerous other commentators. See, for example, Marshall (1978, 632–38); Fitzmyer (1985, 1127–34); and Donahue (1988, 169–72), whose threefold division of the parable still reflects Bultmann’s basic structure.

Chapter 8. What if the Messiah Came and Nothing Changed? The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:23–35)

1. For more detailed study of the system described here, see Carney (1971; 1975, chap. 2), Eisenstadt (1963), Kautsky (1982), Lenski (1966, chaps. 1–4 and 8–9), Lenski and Lenski (1982, chaps. 1–4 and 7).

2. For more on patron-client systems, see Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984); Elliott (1987); Malina (1988); Schmidt, Guasti, Lande, and Scott, eds. (1977).

3. For a discussion of the use of *doulos* as court official, see Smith (1937, 218), Manson (1949, 213), Jeremias (1963, 210); for argument against, see Gundry (1982, 373).

Chapter 10. The Deviant and Prominent Toll Collectors: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Toll Collector (Luke 18:9–14)

1. This discussion is heavily indebted to Pfuhl (1980), Malina (1981, 122–52; n.d., 1–28), Malina and Neyrey (1988).

Selected Bibliography

Reference Works

Aland, Kurt, ed. 1975. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*: *Greek-English Edition of the* Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum. New York: United Bible Societies.

Bauer, W., W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. 1979. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Buttrick, George A., ed. 1962. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 4 vols. Nashville and New York: Abingdon.

Danby, Herbert, trans. 1933. *The Mishnah*. London: Oxford University Press.

Fitzgerald, Robert, trans. 1954. *Oedipus at Colonus*, by Sophocles. In David Greene and Richmond Lattimore, eds., *The Complete Greek Tragedies*. Vol. 3: *Sophocles I*. New York: Modern Library.

Hennecke, E. and W. Schneemelcher. 1963. *New Testament Apocrypha*. Vol. 1: *Gospels and Related Writings*. Trans. R. M. Wilson. Philadelphia: Westminster.

Kittel, Gerhard, ed. 1964–76. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 10 vols. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Liddell, Henry and Robert Scott. 1940. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Moulton, J. L. and G. Milligan. 1930. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Ancient Writers and Primary Sources

Aland, K., M. Black, C. Martini, B. Metzger, and A. Wikgren, eds., 1975. *The Greek New Testament*. New York: United Bible Societies.

Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. H. Rackham. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Elliger, K., W. Rudolph, and H. P. Ruger. 1984. *Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Josephus Flavius. *Jewish Antiquities, IX–XI*. Trans. R. Marcus. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. *Jewish Antiquities, XII–XIV*. Trans. R. Marcus. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. *Jewish Antiquities, XV–XVII*. Trans. R. Marcus and A. Wikgren. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. *Jewish Antiquities, XVIII–XIX*. Trans. L. H. Feldman. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. *The Jewish War, I–III*. Trans. H. St. J. Thackeray. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. *The Jewish War, IV–VII*. Trans. H. St. J. Thackeray. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella. *De re rustica* (On Agriculture), *I–IV*. Trans. H. B. Ash. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
———. *De re rustica* (On Agriculture), *V–IX*. Trans. E. S. Forster and E. H. Heffner. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
———. *De re rustica* (On Agriculture), *X–XII; De arboribus* (On Trees). Trans. E. S. Forster and E. H. Heffner. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Marcus Porcius Cato. *De agri cultura* (On Agriculture). Trans. W. D. Hooper and H. B. Ash. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Marcus Terentius Varro. *Rerum rusticarum* (On Agriculture). Trans. W. D. Hooper and H. B. Ash. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Rahlfs, Alfred, ed. 1979. *Septuaginta*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Works Developing Theoretical Frameworks

Baroja, Julio Caro. 1966. “Honour and Shame: A Historical Account of Several Conflicts.” In J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, 79–137. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Barth, Fredrik. 1977. “Political Leadership among Swat Pathans.” In Steffen W. Schmidt, Laura Guasti, Carl H. Lande, and James C. Scott, eds., *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, 207–219. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Berger, Peter L. 1969. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books.
Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books.
Boulding, Kenneth E. 1968. *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
Bronowski, Jacob. 1973. *The Ascent of Man*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
Burridge, Kenelm. 1969. *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activity*. New York: Schocken Books.
Camara, Helder. 1971. *Spiral of Violence*. London: Sheed & Ward.
Carney, Thomas. 1971. *Bureaucracy in Traditional Society: Romano-Byzantine Bureaucracy Viewed from Within*. Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado.
———. 1973. *The Economies of Antiquity: Controls, Gifts and Trade*. Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado.
———. 1975. *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity*. Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado.
de Sainte Croix, G.M.E. 1981. *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
Eisenstadt, Shmuel Noah. 1958. “The Study of Oriental Despotisms as Systems of Total Power.” *JAS* 17:435–47.
———. 1959. “Primitive Political Systems.” *American Anthropologist* 61:200–220.
———. 1963. *The Political Systems of Empires*. New York: Free Press.
Eisenstadt, S. N., and L. Roniger. 1984. *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Elliott, John H. 1987. “Patronage and Clientism in Early Christian Society: A Short Reading Guide.” *Forum* 3:39–48.
Elliott, John H., ed. 1986. *Semeia 35: Social Scientific Criticism of the New Testament and Its Social World*. Decatur, Ga.: Scholars Press.
Finley, M. I. 1973. *The Ancient Economy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Foster, George M. 1967. “Peasant Society and the Image of the Limited Good.” In Jack M. Potter, May N. Diaz, and George M. Foster, eds., *Peasant Society: A Reader*, 300–323. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. (Republished from *American Anthropologist* 67:293–315.)
Gurr, Ted Robert. 1970. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Hobsbawm, E.J. 1959. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: W. W. Norton.
———. 1973. “Peasants and Politics.” *JPS* 1:3–22.
———. 1981. *Bandits*. 3d ed., rev. New York: Pantheon Books.
Jameson, Frederic. 1981. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
Jones, A.H.M. 1940. *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian*. Oxford: Clarendon.
Kautsky, John. 1982. *The Politics of Aristocratic Empires*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
Kuhn, Thomas S. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2d ed., enl. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Lande, Carl. 1977. “Introduction: The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism.” In Steffen W. Schmidt, Laura Guasti, Carl H. Lande, and James C. Scott, eds., *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, xiii–xxxvii. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Lenski, Gerhard E. 1966. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
Lenski, Gerhard E. and Jean Lenski, 1982. *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
Nash, Manning. 1966. *Primitive and Peasant Economic Systems*. San Francisco: Chandler.
Paige, Jeffery M. 1975. *Agrarian Revolution*. New York: Free Press.
Peristiany, J. G., ed. 1966. *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Pfuhl, Erdwin H., Jr. 1980. *The Deviance Process*. New York: D. Van Nostrand.
Pitt-Rivers, Julian A. 1966. “Honour and Social Status.” In J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, 19–77. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Polanyi, Karl, Conrad Arensberg, Harry Pearson. eds. 1957. *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.
Potter, Jack M., May N. Diaz, and George M. Foster. eds. 1967. *Peasant Society: A Reader*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
Redfield, Robert. 1955. *The Little Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
———. 1956. *Peasant Society and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Rohrbaugh, Richard L. 1991. “The Pre-industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations.” In Jerome Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991.
Ryan, William. 1976. *Blaming the Victim*. Rev. ed. New York: Vintage Books.
Sack, Robert David. 1986. *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Schmidt, Steffen W., Laura Guasti, Carl H. Lande, and James C. Scott, eds. 1977. *Friends, Followers and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Scott, James C. 1976. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
———. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Shanin, Teodor. 1974. “The Nature and Logic of the Peasant Economy.” *JPS* 1:63–80, 186–206.
Shanin, Teodor, ed. 1971. *Peasants and Peasant Societies*. Penguin Modern Sociology Readings. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
Sjoberg, Gideon. 1960. *The Preindustrial City: Past and Present*. New York: Macmillan (Free Press).

Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
———. 1974. *Drama, Field and Metaphor*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
Wink, Walter. 1992. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
Wolf, Eric R. 1966. *Peasants*. Foundations of Modern Anthropology. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Paulo Freire

Freire, Paulo. 1973a. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. 9th ed. (originally published, 1968). New York: Seabury.
———. 1973b. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury. (English ed. prepared in association with the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, Cambridge, Mass.)
———. 1978. *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters of Guinea-Bissau*. Trans. Carman St. John Hunter. New York: Seabury.
———. 1983. *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Harvard Educational Review Monograph Series, no. 1. Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review.
———. 1985. *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*. Trans. Donald Macedo. South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey.
———. n.d. *Paulo Freire: The 'LADOC' Keyhole Series. Latin Americans Look into Their Social and Religious Problems*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, Division for Latin America.
Freire, Paulo, and Ira Shor. 1987. *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey.
Schipani, Daniel S. 1984. *Conscientization and Creativity: Paulo Freire and Christian Education*. New York: University Press of America.
———. 1988. *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*. Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press.

Palestine in the First Century

Appelbaum, Shimon. 1976. "Economic Life in Palestine." CRINT 2:631–700.
———. 1977. "Judea as a Roman Province: The Countryside as a Political and Economic Factor." *ANRW* 2. 8:355–96.
Avi-Yonah, Michael, ed. 1975. *The World History of the Jewish People*. Vol. 7: *The Herodian Period*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
Borg, Marcus. 1984. *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*. Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, 5. New York: Edwin Mellen.
Brooks, Roger. 1983. *Support for the Poor in the Mishnaic Law of Agriculture: Tractate Peah*. BJS 43. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1970. *Law in the New Testament*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
———. 1982. "Law and Society in Jesus's World." *ANRW* 2. 25.1:477–564.
Donahue, John. 1971. "Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification." *CBQ* 33:39–61.
Edersheim, A. 1896. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. 2 vols. New York: Longmans, Green & Co.
Frank, Tenney, ed. 1959. *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*. Vol. 4. Paterson, N.J.: Pageant Books of the Johns Hopkins University Press.
Freyne, Sean. 1980. *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323* B.C.E. to 135 C.E. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
———. 1988. "Bandits in Galilee: A Contribution to the Study of Social Conditions in First Century Palestine." In Jacob Neusner, Peder Borgen, Ernest Frerichs, Richard Horsley, eds., *The Social*

World of Formative Christianity and Judaism (Howard Kee Festschrift), 50–68. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
Gager, John G. 1975. *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
Gil, M. 1970. "Land Ownership in Palestine under Roman Rule." *Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquite* 17:11–53.
Goodman, Martin. 1982. "The First Jewish Revolt: Social Conflict and the Problem of Debt." *JJS* 33:417–26.
———. 1983. *State and Society in Roman Galilee*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanhead.
Grant, F.C. 1926. *The Economic Background of the Gospels*. London: Oxford University Press.
Heichelheim, F. M. 1959. "Roman Syria." In Tenney Frank, ed., *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*. Vol. 4. Paterson, N.J.: Pageant Books of the Johns Hopkins University Press.
Heinemann, Joseph H. 1954. "The Status of the Laborer in Jewish Law and Society in the Tannaitic Period." *HUCA* 25:263–325.
Herzog, William R., II. 1984. "Apocalyptic and the Historical Jesus." *PacThRev* 18:17–25.
———. 1985. "The Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Discovery of the Apocalyptic Jesus." *PacThRev* 19:25–39.
Horsley, Richard. *1987. Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
———. 1988. "Bandits, Messiahs and Longshoremen: Popular Unrest in Galilee around the Time of Jesus." SBLSP, 183–99.
Horsley, Richard, and John S. Hanson. 1985. *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus*. New York: Winston.
Isenberg, Sheldon. 1975. "Power through Temple and Torah in Greco-Roman Palestine." In Jacob Neusner, ed., *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*. Part 2: "Early Christianity," 24–52. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
Jeremias, Joachim. 1969. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Lundquist, John M. 1982. "The Legitimizing Role of the Temple in the Origin of the State." SBLSP 21:271–97.
Malina, Bruce. 1978. "Limited Good and the Social World of Early Christianity." *BTB* 8:162–76.
———. 1981. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. Atlanta: John Knox.
———. 1988. "Patron and Client: The Analogy behind Synoptic Theology." *Forum* 4:2–32.
———. n.d. "Interpreting the New Testament Anthropologically: Some Examples." Paper prepared for the Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation Task Force, Catholic Biblical Association of America.
Malina, Bruce, and Jerome Neyrey. 1988. *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew*. Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge.
Malina, Bruce, and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. 1992. *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
Moxnes, Halvor. 1988. *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Neusner, Jacob. 1973. *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
———. 1979. *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*. New York: Ktav.
———. 1990a. *The Economics of the Mishnah*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
———. 1990b. "Aristotle's Economics and the Mishnah's Economics: The Matter of Wealth and Usury." *JSJ* 21:41–59.
———. 1992. *The Mishnah: Introduction and Reader*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International.
Neyrey, Jerome. 1986. "Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel." *Semeia* 35:91–128.
Oakman, Douglas. 1985. "Jesus and Agrarian Palestine: The Factor of Debt." SBLSP 24:57–73.
———. 1986. *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*. Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, 8. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen.

———. 1987. “The Buying Power of Two Denarii.” *Forum* 3:33–38.
Oppenheimer, A’haron. 1977. *The ’Am Ha–aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic Roman Period*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
Perkins, Pheme. 1984. “Taxes in the New Testament.” *JRE* 12:182–200.
Rostovtzeff, M. 1941. *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon.
———. 1957. *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*. 2d ed. 2 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon.
Safrai, S. 1976a. “The Temple.” CRINT 2:865–907.
———. 1976b. “The Synagogue.” CRINT 2:908–44.
———. 1976c. “Home and Family.” CRINT 2:728–92.
———. 1977. “The Temple and the Divine Service.” In Michael Avi-Yonah and Zvi Baras, eds., *The World History of the Jewish People*. Vol. 8: *Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period*, chap. 9. Jerusalem: Massada.
Safrai, S., and M. Stern, eds. 1974. Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad novum testamentum (*The Jewish People in the First Century*). Vol. 1: *Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
———. 1976. Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad novum testamentum (*The Jewish People in the First Century*). Vol. 2. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Saldarini, Anthony. 1988a. “Political and Social Roles of the Pharisees and Scribes in Galilee.” SBLSP 200–209.
———. 1988b. *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier.
Schottroff, Luise, and Wolfgang Stegemann. 1986. *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*. Trans. M. J. O’Connell. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
Schurer, Emil. 1885. *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*. 2d ed., rev. 5 vols. Trans. J. Macpherson, S. Taylor, and P. Christie. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
Sellers, O. R. 1962. “Weights and Measures.” *IDB* 4:830–33.
Stern, M. 1974. “The Province of Judaea.” CRINT 1:308–76.
———. 1975. “The Herodian Dynasty and the Province of Judea at the End of the Period of the Second Temple.” In Michael Avi-Yonah, ed., *The World History of the Jewish People*. Vol. 7: *The Herodian Period*, 124–78. Jerusalem: Massada.
———. 1976. “Aspects of Jewish Society: The Priesthood and Other Classes.” CRINT 2:561–630.
Tcherikover, Victor. 1977. *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*. New York: Atheneum.
Temporini, Hildegard, and Wolfgang Haase. 1972. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
Theissen, Gerd. 1978. *Sociology of Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Tristram, H. B. 1894. *Eastern Customs in Bible Lands*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Studies of the Gospel Tradition and the Theology of the Evangelists

Bailey, Kenneth E. 1991. “Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels.” *Asian Journal of Theology* 5:34–54.
Black, C. Clifton. 1989. *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate*. Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press.
Bornkamm, Gunther. 1960. *Jesus of Nazareth*. Trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey, with James M. Robinson. New York: Harper & Row. (German original, *Jesus von Nazareth*, 1956.)
Bornkamm, G., G. Barth, and H. J. Held. 1963. *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
Bultmann, Rudolf. 1934. *Jesus and the Word*. Trans. L. P. Smith and E. Huntress. New York: Scribner’s. (German original, *Jesus*, 1926.)

———. 1963. *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Trans. John Marsh. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. (German original, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, 1921.)
Cadbury, Henry J. 1937. *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus*. London: Macmillan.
Conzelmann, Hans. 1960. *The Theology of Saint Luke*. Trans. G. Buswell. New York: Harper & Brothers.
Cullmann, Oscar. 1964. *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*. Trans. F. V. Filson. Philadelphia: Westminster.
Dibelius, Martin. n.d. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Trans. B. L. Woolf. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. (German original, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*. Tubingen: Mohr, 1919.)
Gadamer, Hans G. 1975. *Truth and Method*. Trans. Sheed & Ward, Ltd. New York: Seabury.
Gerhardsson, B. 1991. "If We Do Not Cut the Parables out of Their Frames." *NTS* 37:321–35.
Guttgemanns, Erhardt. 1979. *Candid Questions Concerning Gospel Form Criticism*. Trans. W. G. Doty. Pittsburgh: Pickwick. (German original, *Offene Fragen zur Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971.)
McKnight, Edgar. 1969. *What Is Form Criticism?* Philadelphia: Fortress.
Marxsen, Willi. 1969. *Mark the Evangelist*. Trans. James Boyce, Donald Juel, William Poehlman, Roy Harrisville. New York: Abingdon. (German original, *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums*. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956.)
Perrin, Norman. 1967. *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*. New York: Harper & Row.
———. 1969. *What Is Redaction Criticism?* Philadelphia: Fortress.
Rohde, Joachim. 1969. *Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists*. Trans. D. M. Barton. Philadelphia: Westminster.
Schmidt, Karl L. 1919. *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*. Berlin: Trowitzsh & Sohn.
Schweitzer, Albert. 1956. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Trans. W. Montgomery. New York: Macmillan. (German original, *Von Reimarus zum Wrede*, 1906.)
Theissen, Gerd. 1983. *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*. Trans. F. McDonagh. Philadelphia: Fortress. (German original, *Urchristliche Wundergeschichten des synoptischen Evangelien*. Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1974.)
Thompson, W.G. 1970. *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community*. AnBib 44. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
Wrede, Wilhelm. 1971. *The Messianic Secret*. Trans. J.C.C. Grieg. Greenwood, S.C.: Attic. (German original, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verstandnis des Markusevangeliums*. 1901.)

Studies of the Parables or Related to Them

Abrahams, I.A. 1917. *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bailey, Kenneth E. 1976. *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
———. 1980. *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables, Their Culture and Style*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Belo, Fernando. 1981. *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*. Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
Boucher, Madeline. 1977. *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study*. CBQMS, 6. Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America.
———. 1981. *The Parables*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier.
Breech, James. 1983. *The Silence of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Cadoux, A. T. 1931. *The Parables of Jesus: Their Art and Use*. New York: Macmillan.
Cardenal, Ernesto, ed. 1982. *The Gospel in Solentiname*. 4 vols. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
Carlston, Charles E. 1975. *The Parables of the Triple Tradition*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Crossan, John Dominic. 1973. *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*. New York: Harper & Row.
———. 1974a. “The Servant Parables of Jesus.” In Robert W. Funk, ed., *Semeia 1: A Structuralist Approach to the Parables*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.
———. 1974b. “Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus.” In Robert W. Funk, ed., *Semeia 1: A Structuralist Approach to the Parables*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.
———. 1975. *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*. Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications.
———. 1980. *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus*. New York: Seabury/Crossroad.
———, ed. 1974c. *Semeia 2: The Good Samaritan*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.
Danker, F.W. *1969. Jesus and the New Age*. St. Louis: Concordia.
Delorme, Jean, ed. 1989. *Les Paraboles evangeliques: Perspectives nouvelles*. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf.
Dodd, C. H. 1935. *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 3d ed. London: Nisbet & Co.
Donahue, John R. 1988. *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Drury, John. 1985. *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory*. New York: Crossroad.
Ellis, E. Earle. 1966. *The Gospel of Luke*. New Century Bible. London: Oliphant.
Fitzmyer, Joseph. 1981. *The Gospel according to Luke, I–IX*. Vol. 1. Anchor Bible 28. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
———. 1985. *The Gospel according to Luke, X–XXIV*. Vol. 2. Anchor Bible 28A. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
Funk, Robert W. 1975. *Jesus as Precursor*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.
———. 1982. *Parables and Presence*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
———, ed. 1988. *The Parables of Jesus: A Report of the Jesus Seminar*. Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge.
Glen, John Stanley. 1962. *The Parables of Conflict in Luke*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
Goulder, M. D. 1974. *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*. London: SPCK.
Gundry, Robert H. 1982. *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Jeremias, Joachim. 1963. *The Parables of Jesus*. 6th ed. Trans. S. H. Hooke. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. (German original, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 1947.)
Johnson, Sherman. 1960. *The Gospel according to Mark*. Harper’s NT Commentaries. New York: Harper & Row.
Julicher, Adolf. 1910. *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, Tubingen: J. C. Mohr. (Vol. 1, 1898; Vol. 2, 1899.)
Kingsbury, Jack Dean. 1969. *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13*. London: SPCK.
Klausner, Joseph. 1925. *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times and Teaching*. Trans. Herbert Danby. New York: Macmillan.
Linnemann, Eta. 1966. *Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition*. Trans. John Sturdy. 3d ed. New York: Harper & Row.
McNeile, A. H. 1915. *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*. London: Macmillan.
Mann, C. S. 1971. *The Gospel according to Mark*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
Manson, T. W. 1949. *The Sayings of Jesus*. London: SCM.
Manson, William. 1930. *The Gospel of Luke*. Moffatt. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
Marshall, I. Howard. 1978. *The Gospel of Luke*. NICGNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Montefiore, Claude. 1909. *The Synoptic Gospels*. 3 vols. London: Macmillan.
Nineham, D. E. 1963. *Saint Mark*. Pelican Commentaries. New York: Penguin Books.
Oesterley, W.O.E. 1936. *The Gospel Parables in Light of Their Jewish Background*. London: SPCK.
Perkins, Pheme. 1981. *Hearing the Parables of Jesus*. New York: Paulist.
Plummer, A. 1896. *Saint Luke*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
Sacks, Sheldon. 1967. *Fiction and the Shape of Belief*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Schweizer, Eduard. 1970. *The Good News according to Mark*. Trans. Donald Madvig. Richmond: John Knox.
———. 1975. *The Good News according to Matthew*. Trans. David Green. Atlanta: John Knox.
———. 1984. *The Good News according to Luke*. Trans. David Green. Atlanta: John Knox.
Scott, Bernard Brandon. 1981. *Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
———. 1989. *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
Segundo, Juan Luis. 1985. *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*. Trans. John Drury. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
Smith, B.T.D. 1937. *The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Talbert, Charles H. 1982. *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*. New York: Crossroad.
Taylor, Vincent. 1966. *The Gospel according to St. Mark*. 2d ed. London: Macmillan.
Thoma, Clemens, and Michael Wyschogrod, eds. 1989. *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*. New York: Paulist.
Tolbert, Mary Ann. 1979. *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Via, Dan O., Jr. 1967. *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
———. 1974. "Parable and Example Story: A Literary-Structuralist Approach." In Robert W. Funk, ed., *Semeia 1: A Structuralist Approach to the Parables*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.
Young, Brad H. 1989. *Jesus and His Jewish Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teaching*. New York: Paulist.

Studies of Specific Parables

The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16)

Amjad-Ali, Christine. 1988. "Whose Justice: The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard." *Al-Mushir* 30:136–40.
Bauer, Johannes B. 1961. "Gnadelohn oder Tageslohn?" *Bib* 42:224–28.
Curtis, W. A. 1926/27. "The Parable of the Laborers, Mt XX 1–16." *ExpT* 38:6–10.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1974a. "Workers in the Vineyard: A Parable of Jesus." *JJS* 25:64–91.
de Ru, G. 1966. "Conception of Reward in the Teaching of Jesus." *NovT* 8:202–22.
Elliott, John H. 1992. "Matthew 20:1–15: A Parable of Invidious Comparison and Evil Eye Accusation." *BTB* 22:52–65.
Fortna, Robert. 1990. " 'You Have Made Them Equal to Us!' (Mt 20:1–16)." *JThSoAfrica* 72:66–72.
Fuchs, Ernst. 1965. "Das Wunder der Gute: Predigt uber Mt 20:1–16." In idem, *Glaube und Erfahrung: Gesammelte Aufsatze*. Vol. 3, 471–79. Tubingen: Mohr.
Gryglewicz, F. 1957. "The Gospel of the Overworked Workers." *CBQ* 19:190–98.
Harnisch, Wolfgang. 1977. "Metaphorical Process in Matthew 20:1–15." SBLSP 11:231–50.
Heinemann, H. 1948/49. "The Conception of Reward in Matthew XX, 1–16." *JJS* 1:85–89.
Mitton, C. L. 1966. "Expounding the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard." *ExpT* 77:307–11.
Oesterley, W.O.E. 1908. "The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard." *Exp* 7th ser. 5:333–43.
Schottroff, Luise. 1984. "Human Solidarity and the Goodness of God: The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard." In W. Schottroff and W. Stegemann, eds., *God of the Lowly*, 129–47. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

The Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1–12 and pars.)

Crossan, John Dominic. 1971. “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen.” *JBL* 90:451–65.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1970a. “The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers.” In idem, *Law in the New Testament*, 286–312. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
———. 1974b. “Allegory of the Wicked Vinedressers.” *JTS* 25:426–32.
Drury, John. 1973. “The Sower, the Vineyard and the Place of Allegory in the Interpretation of Mark’s Parables.” *JTS* n.s. 24:367–79.
Evans, C. A. 1984. “On the Vineyard Parables of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12.” *BibZeit* 28:82–86.
Gray, Arthur. 1920/21. “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen.” *Hibbert Journal* 19:42–52.
Hengel, Martin. 1968. “Das Gleichnis von den Weingartnern: Mc 12:1–12 im Licht der Zenonpapyri und der rabbinischen Gleichnisse.” *ZNW* 59:1–39.
Kingsbury, Jack Dean. 1986. “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen and the Secret of Jesus’ Divine Sonship in Matthew: Some Literary-Critical Observations.” *JBL* 105:643–55.
Leon-Dufour, X. 1965. “La Parabole des vignerons homicides.” *Sciences ecclesiastiques* 17:365–96.
Milavec, Aaron. 1989. “A Fresh Analysis of the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen in the Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue.” In Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod, eds., *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, 81–117. New York: Paulist.
———. 1990. “The Identity of ‘The Son’ and ‘The Others’: Mark’s Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen Reconsidered.” *BTB* 20:30–37.
Newell, J. and R. Newell. 1972. “Parable of the Wicked Tenants.” *NovT* 14:226–37.
Nolan, B. M. 1980. “The Heir Unapparent: Detecting the Royal Theology in the Parable of the Master’s Son.” *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 4:84–95.
Snodgrass, Klyne R. 1974. “Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: Is the Gospel of Thomas the Original?” *NTS* 21:142–44.
———. 1983. *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation*. WUNT 27. Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
Stern, David. 1989. “Jesus’ Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandmen.” In Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod, eds., *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, 42–80. New York: Paulist.

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31)

Barth, Karl. 1921. “Miserable Lazarus.” *USQR* 46:259–68.
Bauckham, R. 1991. “The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels.” *NTS* 37:225–46.
Bishop, Eric F. F. 1973. “A Yawning Chasm.” *EvQ* 45:3–5.
Cave, C. H. 1969. “Lazarus and the Lukan Deuteronomy.” *NTS* 15:319–25.
Derrett, J. D. M. 1961a. “Fresh Light on St. Luke xvi:11: Dives and Lazarus and the Preceding Sayings.” *NTS* 7:364–80. (Also in J.D.M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970.)
Glombitza, O. 1970. “Der reiche Mann und der arme Lazarus: Luc xvi: 19–31.” *NovT* 12:166–80.
Grensted, L. W. 1914/15. “The Use of Enoch in St. Luke xvi. 19–31.” *ExpT* 26:333–34.
Hanson, R.P.C. 1943/44. “A Note on Luke xvi. 14–31.” *ExpT* 55:221–22.
Haupt, Paul. 1921. “Abraham’s Bosom.” *American Journal of Philology* 42:162–67.
Kreitzer, L. 1992. “Luke 16:19–31 and 1 Enoch 22.” *ExpT* 103:139–42.
Powell, W. 1954/55. “The Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke xvi, 1931).” *ExpT* 66:350–51.
Rohrbaugh, Richard L. 1978. *The Biblical Interpreter: An Agrarian Bible in an Industrial Age*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
Schneider, F., and W. Stenger. 1979. “Die offene Tur und die unuberschreitbare Kluft: Strukturanalytische Uberlegungen zum Gleichnis vom Reichen Mann und armen Lazarus.” *NTS* 25:273–83.
Standen, A. O. 1921/22. “The Parable of Dives and Lazarus and Enoch 22.” *ExpT* 33:523.

Tanghe, Vincent. 1984. “Abraham, son fils et son envoye (Luc 16:19–31).” *RevBib* 91:66–75.

The Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:23–35)

de Boer, Martinus C. 1988. “Ten Thousand Talents? Matthew’s Interpretation and Redaction of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.” *CBQ* 50:214–32.
Deidun, Thomas. 1976. “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt 18:23–35).” *BTB* 6:203–24.
Deiss, L. 1964. “La Parabole du débiteur impitoyable.” *Assemblées du Seigneur* 76:29–47.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1970c. “Law in the New Testament: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.” In idem, *Law in the New Testament*, 32–47. London: Darton, Longman, & Todd.
Dietzfelbinger, C. 1972. “Das Gleichnis von der erlassenen Schuld: Eine theologische Untersuchung von Matthaus 18,23–35.” *Evangelische Theologie* 32:437–51.
Fuchs, Ernst. 1959. “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.” *StudEv* 73:487–94.
Henry, H. T. 1940/41. “The Unmerciful Servant.” *HomPastRev* 41:1–10.
Scott, B. B. 1985. “The King’s Accounting: Matt 18:23–34.” *JBL* 104:429–42.

The Talents (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27)

Dauviller, Jean. 1948. “La Parabole des mines ou des talents et le #99 du code Hammourabi.” In idem, *Mélanges dédies a M. le professor Joseph Magnol*, 153–65. Paris: Recueil Sirey.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1966. “Law in the New Testament: The Parable of the Talents and Two Logia.” *ZNW* 56:185–95.
Dupont, Jacques. 1969. “La Parabole de talents ou des mines.” *Revue de theologie et de philosophie* 19:376–91.
Flusser, David. 1989. “Aesop’s Miser and the Parable of the Talents.” In Clemens Thoma and David Wyschogrod, *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, 9–25. New York: Paulist.
Fortna, Robert. 1993. “Reading Jesus’ Parable of the Talents through Underclass Eyes.” Manuscript of article to be published.
Harrington, Donald J. 1991. “Polemical Parables in Matthew 24—25.” *USQR* 44:287–98.
Johnson, L. T. 1982. “The Lukan Kingship Parable.” *NovT* 24:139–59.
Kermode, Frank. 1979. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
McGaughy, Lane C. 1975. “Fear of Yahweh and the Mission of Judaism: A Postexilic Maxim and Its Early Christian Expansion in the Parable of the Talents.” *JBL* 94:235–45.
Mutch, John. 1930/31. “The Man with the One Talent.” *ExpT* 42:332–34.
Naegele, J. 1986. “Translation of *talanton* ‘talent.’ ” *BibTrans* 37:441–43.
Reinert, Francis. 1977. “Parable of the Throne Claimant (Lk 19:12, 14–15a, 27) Reconsidered.” *CBQ* 39:505–14.
Rohrbaugh, Richard. 1993. “A Peasant Reading of the Talents/Pounds: A Text of Terror.” *BTB* 23:32–39.

The Pharisee and the Toll Collector (Luke 18:9–14)

Downing, F. Gerald. 1992. “The Ambiguity of ‘The Pharisee and the Toll Collector’ (Luke 18:9–14) in the Greco-Roman World of Late Antiquity.” *CBQ* 54:80–99.
Franks, R. S. 1926/27. “The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.” *ExpT* 38:373–76.
Hengel, M. 1974. “Die ganz andere Gerechtigkeit Bibelarbeit uber Lk 18:9–14.” *Theologische Beiträge* 5:1–13.

Lorenzen, Thorwald. 1986. “The Radicality of Grace: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk 18:9–14) as a Parable of Jesus.” *Faith and Mission* 3:66–75.
Oke, C. Clark. 1928. “The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.” *Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* 5:122–26.
Schottroff, Luise. 1973. “Die Erzahlung vom Pharisaer und Zollner als Beispiel fur die theologische Kunst der Uberredens.” In H. D. Betz and L. Schottroff, eds., *Neues Testament und christlche Existenz*, 439–61. Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr.

The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8)

Catchpole, David. 1983. “Q and the Friend at Midnight.” *JTS* 34:407–24.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1978. “The Friend at Midnight: Asian Ideas in the Gospel of St. Luke.” In E. Bammel, C. K. Barrett, and W. D. Davies, eds., *Donurn Gentilicium: New Testament Studies in Honor of David Daube*, 78–87. Oxford: Clarendon.
Huffard, E. W. 1978. “The Parable of the Friend at Midnight: God’s Honor or Man’s Persistence.” *RestQ* 21:154–60.
Johnson, Alan. 1979. “Assurance for Man: The Fallacy of Translating *anaideia* by ‘Persistence’ in Luke 11:5–8.” *JEvThSoc* 22:123–31.
Levison, N. 1925. “Importunity?” *Exp* 9th ser. 3:456–60.
Rickards, Raymond R. 1977. “The Translation of Luke 11:5–13.” *BibTrans* 28:239–43.

The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8)

Cranfield, C.E.B. 1963. “The Parable of the Unjust Judge and the Eschatology of Luke-Acts.” *SJT* 16:297–301.
Delling, Gerhard. 1962. “Das Gleichnis vom gottlosen Richter.” *ZNW* 53:1–25.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1971/72. “Law in the New Testament: The Parable of the Unjust Judge.” *NTS* 18:178–91.
Spicq, C. 1961. “La Parabole de la veuve obstinée et du juge inerte, aux décisions impromptues.” *RevBib* 68:68–90.
Wifstrand, Albert. 1964. “Lukas XVIII,7.” *NTS* 11:72–74.

The Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1–13)

Beames, Frederick. 1912/13. “The Unrighteous Steward.” *ExpT* 24:150–55.
Baverstock, A. H. 1937. “The Unjust Steward: An Interpretation.” *Theology* 35:78–83.
Boyd, William F. 1938/39. “The Parable of the Unjust Steward.” *ExpT* 50:46.
Bretscher, Paul G. 1951. “Brief Studies: The Parable of the Unjust Steward—A New Approach to Luke 16:1–9.” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22:756–62.
Collins, R. L. 1910/11. “Is the Parable of the Unjust Steward Pure Sarcasm?” *ExpT* 22:525–26.
Comisky, J. 1971. “The Unjust Steward.” *Bible Today* 52:229–35.
Compston, H.F.B. 1919/20. “Friendship without Mammon.” *ExpT* 31:282.
Derrett, J.D.M. 1961b. “Fresh Light on St. Luke XVI:1: Parable of the Unjust Steward.” *NTS* 7:198–219.
———. 1972. “ ‘Take Thy Bond . . . and Write Fifty.’ Luke 16:6: The Nature of the Bond.” *JTS* 23:438–40.
Drexler, H. 1967. “Zu Lukas 16,1–7.” *ZNW* 58:286–88.
Eagar, Alexander. 1895. “The Parable of the Unjust Steward.” *Exp* 5th ser. 2:457–70.
Firth, C. B. 1951/52. “The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward.” *ExpT* 63:93–95.

Fitzmyer, J. A. 1964. “The Story of the Dishonest Manager (Lk. 16:113).” *ThStud* 25:23–42.
Fletcher, Donald. 1963. “The Riddle of the Unjust Steward: Is Irony the Key?” *JBL* 82:15–30.
Gachter, Paul. 1950. “The Parable of the Dishonest Steward after Oriental Conceptions.” *CBQ* 12:121–31.
Gibson, M. D. 1902/3. “On the Parable of the Unjust Steward.” *ExpT* 14:334.
Hiers, Richard. 1970. “Friends by Unrighteous Mammon: The Eschatological Proletariat.” *JAAR* 38:30–36.
Jannaris, A. N. 1901/2. “The Unrighteous Steward and Machiavellianism.” *ExpT* 13:128–30.
Kosmala, H. 1964. “The Parable of the Unjust Steward in the Light of Qumran.” *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 3:114–121.
Loader, William. 1989. “Jesus and the Rogue in Luke 16,1–8a: The Parable of the Unjust Steward.” *RevBib* 96:518–32.
Marshall, H. S. 1927/28. “The Parable of the Untrustworthy Steward.” *ExpT* 39:120–22.
Marshall, I. H. 1968. “Luke XVI,8—Who Commended the Unjust Steward?” *JTS* 19:617–19.
Oesterley, W.O.E. 1903. “The Parable of the ‘Unjust’ Steward.” *Exp* 6th ser. 7:273–83.
Pargiter, Frederick E. 1920/21. “The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward.” *ExpT* 32:136–37.
Paul, Geoffrey. 1958. “Studies in Texts: The Unjust Steward.” *Theology* 61:189–93.
Schwarz, G. 1974. “ ‘. . . lobte den betrugerischen Verwalter?’ Lukas 16,8a.” *BibZeit* 18:94–95.
Scott, R.B.Y. 1937/38. “The Parable of the Unjust Steward.” *ExpT* 49:234–35.
Steele, J. 1927/28. “The Unjust Steward.” *ExpT* 39:236–37.
Topel, L. John. 1975. “On the Injustice of the Unjust Steward: Luke 16:1–13.” *CBQ* 37:216–27.
Wansey, J. C. 1935/36. “The Parable of the Unjust Steward: An Interpretation.” *ExpT* 47:39–40.
Williams, Francis. 1964. “Is Almsgiving the Point of the ‘Unjust Steward’?” *JBL* 83:293–97.

Index of Modern Authors

Abrahams, I., 83
Amjad-Ali, C., 96
Appelbaum, S., 54, 203
Arensberg, C. M., 33

Bailey, K. E., 14, 44, 54, 72, 178, 185, 188, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 209, 218, 219, 220, 221, 226, 227, 228, 229, 234, 238, 240, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 256, 270
Baroja, J. C., 92
Barth, F., 145
Barth, G., 270
Barth, K., 258
Baverstock, A. H., 234
Beames, F., 239
Belo, F., 94, 125, 130, 182, 183, 212, 269
Berger, P., 7, 19, 26, 54, 62, 259
Bertram, G., 249
Bishop, E.F.F., 122
Black, C., 45
Bohr, N., 1
Borg, M., 181
Borges, J. L., 15
Bornkamm, G., 34–37, 38, 42, 139, 270
Boyd, W., 258
Boulding, K., 16
Breech, J., 42, 44, 50, 88, 240, 241, 242
Bronowski, J., 1
Bultmann, R., 34–37, 38, 42, 52, 114, 115, 116, 126, 127, 130, 133, 197, 216, 218, 237, 271
Burridge, K., 178

Cadbury, H. J., 31–34, 38
Cadoux, A. T., 42, 89, 98, 115, 125, 127, 153, 175, 177, 185, 195, 197, 217, 219, 237, 245, 255, 270
Camara, H., 108–9
Cardenal, E., 155, 161
Carlston, C., 42, 270, 271

Carney, T., 54, 59, 62, 68, 137, 144, 241, 270, 271
Catchpole, D., 195, 196, 209
Cave, C. H., 126
Collins, R. L., 234
Compston, H.F.B., 234
Conzelmann, H. 270
Crossan, J. D., 13, 14, 42, 43, 46, 81, 82, 83, 99, 102, 115, 116, 130, 132, 134, 177, 199, 202, 209, 233, 234, 238, 239, 242, 246, 271
Cullmann, O., 42

Danby, H., 185, 223, 224
Danker, F. W., 174
de Boer, M., 144
Derrett, J.D.M., 54, 92–93, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 110–11, 118, 120, 135, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 145, 146, 159, 160, 163, 164, 165, 196, 201, 202, 203, 208, 209, 211, 212, 220, 221, 226, 243, 246, 247, 248, 249, 257, 258, 271
de Ru, G., 93
Dibelius, M., 52, 270
Dietzfelbinger, C., 133
Dodd, C. H., 10, 11, 13, 41, 42, 48, 53, 81, 87, 105, 106, 133, 152, 153, 194, 197, 235, 237, 270, 271
Donahue, J., 81, 84, 87, 124, 127, 132, 133, 153, 154, 173, 180, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 196, 203, 216, 218, 228, 230, 231, 234, 236, 246, 248, 271
Downing, F. G., 175, 177
Drury, J., 80

Eagar, A., 245
Edersheim, A., 227
Eisenstadt, S. N., 55, 62, 68, 138, 141, 211, 270, 271
Elliott, J., 93, 211, 271
Ellis, E. E., 174, 175

Fitzmyer, J., 117, 118, 120, 174, 186, 194, 195, 196, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 235, 241, 243, 245, 246, 248, 249, 271
Foerster, W., 112
Foster, G., 204
Freire, P., 3, 7, 16, 17–24, 27, 28, 29, 39, 77, 95–96, 214, 230, 259, 260, 261, 262
Freud, S., 17
Freyne, S., 54, 86
Fuchs, E., 132
Funk, R., 13, 14

Gachter, P., 244, 246, 247, 249, 256
Gager, J., 16
Gadamer, H. G., 46
Gibson, M. D., 247
Glen, J. S., 125, 127
Goodman, M., 207
Goulder, M. D., 80

Goulet, D., 20
Grant, F. C., 54, 180, 181
Gray, A., 270
Grensted, L. W., 122
Gryglewicz, F., 91
Guasti, L., 68, 211, 271
Gundry, R., 84, 87, 270, 271
Gurr, T. R., 111
Guttgemanns, E., 52, 270

Harnisch, W., 80
Haupt, P., 121
Heichelheim, F. M., 90
Heinemann, H., 93
Held, H. J., 270
Hennecke, E., 152
Herrmann, J., 112
Herzog, W. R., 257
Hiers, R., 234, 235
Hobbes, T., 88
Hobsbawm, E. J., 111, 270
Horsley, R., 25, 86, 146, 181, 270
Huffard, E. W., 196, 200, 201

Isenberg, S., 178, 179

Jameson, F., 3
Jannaris, A. N., 234, 245
Jeremias, J., 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 27, 41, 42, 54, 81, 83, 86, 87, 90, 91, 93, 99, 106, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 122, 124, 126–27, 130, 132, 133, 134, 144, 151, 152, 154, 155, 156, 164, 174, 176, 186, 187, 188, 195, 196, 197, 198, 200, 201, 202, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 223, 233, 234, 236, 237, 240, 249, 256, 270, 271
Johnson, A., 212
Jones, A.H.M., 156
Julicher, A., 10, 11, 100, 260

Kafka, F., 15
Kautsky, J., 54, 55, 58, 63, 64, 66–73, 138, 157, 162, 164, 270, 271
Kermode, F., 106
Kingsbury, J. D., 45
Klausner, J., 83, 84, 85
Kreitzer, L., 122
Kuhn, T., 14, 16, 49, 50, 51, 220

Lande, C. H., 68, 145, 211, 271
Lenski, G., 25, 54, 55, 56–66, 84, 89, 90, 107, 136, 137, 138, 178, 180, 221, 224, 227, 250, 251, 270, 271
Leon-Dufour, X., 99

Levison, N., 195, 199, 201, 202, 203
Liddell, H., 202
Linnemann, E., 81, 85, 87, 91, 132, 133, 134, 176, 185, 216, 218
Loader, W., 236

McGaughy, L., 151, 152, 153, 154
McKnight, E., 270
McNeile, A. H., 132
Malina, B., 25, 33, 68, 91, 109, 180, 190, 211, 213, 230, 247, 271
Malina, B., 249
Mann, C. S., 91
Manson, T. W., 80, 88, 117, 121, 122, 132, 133, 153, 154, 175, 177, 186, 195, 216, 217, 221, 235, 239, 240, 249, 270, 271
Manson, W., 174
Marcus, R., 143
Marshall, I. H., 118, 121, 122, 124, 174, 195, 216, 217, 218, 219, 221, 271
Marx, K., 17
Marxsen, W., 270
Milavec, A., 102, 271
Montefiore, C., 118
Moulton, J. L., 202, 213, 225, 244
Mutch, J., 152

Neusner, J., 182–83, 223, 224, 246, 247
Newell, J., 111, 271
Neyrey, J., 182, 190, 213, 271
Nineham, D., 271

Oakman, D., 64, 90, 108, 166
Oesterley, W.O.E., 83, 87, 101, 115, 116, 117, 118, 122, 123, 124, 127, 131, 133, 151, 153, 177, 195, 199, 219, 220, 234, 241, 245, 270
Oppenheimer, A., 185

Paige, J., 72, 84, 103, 111, 162
Paul, G., 234
Pearson, H., 33
Peristiany, J. G., 25
Perkins, P., 124, 127, 176, 177, 185, 195, 202
Perrin, N., 42, 81, 131, 134, 139, 216, 219, 238, 269
Pfuhl, E. H., 189, 271
Pinto, A. V., 96
Pitt-Rivers, J., 92
Plummer, A., 174
Polanyi, K., 33

Redfield, R., 23, 65
Rohde, J., 270
Rohrbaugh, R., 25, 118, 152, 156, 222, 247, 249, 250

Ryan, W., 94–95

Sack, R., 204
Sacks, S., 46
Safrai, S., 178, 223
Scheler, M., 50
Schmidt. K. L., 48
Schmidt, S., 68, 211, 271
Schrottroff, L., 86, 88, 90, 178, 185, 188
Schurer, E., 222
Schweitzer, A., 7, 14, 15, 30, 31–34, 35, 36, 38, 41, 42, 45, 49, 219
Schweizer, E., 126–27, 271
Scott, B. B., 11, 13, 42, 44, 51, 52, 79, 81, 82, 83, 85, 89, 91, 100, 116, 118, 120, 122–23, 130, 134, 135, 138, 139, 140, 144, 148, 151, 154, 185, 198, 199, 209, 211, 220, 221, 222, 227, 231, 234, 239, 242, 244
Scott, J. C., 64, 68, 84, 108, 111, 194, 204, 205, 206, 207, 211, 233, 252–54, 270, 271
Scott, R.B.Y., 176, 234
Segundo, J. L., 3, 121, 128
Sellers, O. R., 159
Shor, I., 18
Sjoberg, G., 156
Smith, B.T.D., 83, 87, 106, 114, 115, 117, 120, 122, 123, 125, 127, 133, 135, 151, 152, 154, 155, 177, 195, 202, 219, 223, 249, 270, 271
Snodgrass, K., 12, 99, 103, 104
Stahlin, G., 221, 223
Standen, A. O., 122
Steele, J., 239
Stegemann, W., 188
Stern, D., 271
Stern, M., 54, 55

Talbert, C., 174, 175
Taylor, V., 271
Tcherikover, V., 156
Theissen, G., 52, 209, 210, 270
Thompson, W. G., 133
Tolbert, M. A., 44
Topel, L. J., 236
Tristram, H. B., 229
Turner, V., 257

Via, D., 13, 14, 42, 43, 50, 81, 82, 83, 87, 93, 133, 134, 135, 153, 154, 177, 238, 241, 242, 248, 263, 271

Wansey, J. C., 234
Weiss, J., 219
Williams, F., 235–36
Wink, W., 229–30

Wolf, E., 64, 84, 108
Wrede, W., 35, 41, 42, 44

Index of Ancient Texts

Hebrew Bible

Genesis
13:2 130
14:13–24 130
15 126
15:2 120
18:1–15 122
18:1–21 211
19:1–14 211
23:13–16 130
25:7–11 130

Exodus
3:8 183
20:2 183
20:13 184
20:14 184
20:15 183
20:16 184
20:17 183
22:21 210
22:21–24 225
22:22–24 210
22:25–27 246

Leviticus
11:45 182
16:29–31 186
19:10 210

19:34 210
20:26 125
23:27 186
23:29 186
23:32 186
25:35–38 166
25:36–38 246

Numbers
27:5–11 112
29:7 186

Deuteronomy
10:16–18 225
10:17–19 210
14:22–23 186
14:28–29 210, 225
15:4–5 125, 183
15:7–11 166, 246
22:9 104
22:9–11 182
23:19–20 246
24:17–18 225
24:17–22 210
26:1–15 210
26:12 183
26:12–13 225
27:19 210,225
28:50 213

Joshua
13–19 112
24:28, 32 112

1 Samuel
9:16 121
2:29 212

2 Samuel
1 147

1 Kings
2 147

21 112
21:3 112
21:19 119

2 Kings
9 112

2 Chronicles
19:4–7 221

Nehemiah
9:1 186

Esther
9:31 186

Psalms
68:5 225
94:6 225
111:10 226
118:23 98
146:9 225

Proverbs
1:7 226
7:10–27 213
21:29 213

Isaiah
1:5 126
1:16–17, 23 225
5:1–2 100, 102, 104
5:1–7 80
5:7 102,104
5:8 104
5:8–10 112
10:1–2 225
49:6 153
56:11 212

Jeremiah
7:5–7 225
8:4 213

12:10 80
22:3 225

Ezekiel
22:6–7 225

Amos
2:6–7 112, 221
4:1–2 112
5:10–12 221
5:12 121
5:15a 121

Micah
2:2 112
6:8 125

Zechariah
7:8–12 225

Jewish Literature

Enoch
22 122

Sirach
23:6 212
25:22 213
26:10–11 213
29:21–28 256
35:14–26 221
40:28 242
40:28–30 256
40:30 213

Mishnah
Aboth
4:8 224
Baba Metzia
5:1 240
Kethuboth
4:7–12 224

9:6 224
11:1–6 224
12:3 224
Sanhedrin
1:1 223
1:1–3 222
1:6 222
Shebiith
10:4 222
Sota
1:3 222

New Testament

Matthew
5:25–26 10
6:24 235
7:11 236
7:28 131
8:11–12 211
10:5–23 210
10:11–14 210
10:14–15 211
10:26–27 167
11:1 131
11:16–19 10
12:38–42 126
13:12 151
13:24 10, 83
13:31 83
13:33 83
13:44 83
13:45 83
13:47 83
13:36–43 12
13:53 131
16:1–4 126
18:1–35 131, 133
18:21–22 132–133
18:23–35 77, 131–49, 132, 133

18:23	83
18:23a	134, 135
18:24	137
18:33	134
18:34	131, 132
18:34–35	134
18:35	131, 133, 134, 135
19:1	131
19:1–30	79
19:16–22	79
19:23–24	79
19:25–30	79
19:30	79, 91
20:1–15/16	10, 32, 49, 50, 77, 79–97, 82, 166, 206
20:1a	83
20:lb–15	83
20:1–7	84, 90
20:8	84
20:8–15	84
20:8–10	92
20:8c	83
20:11–12	92
20:11–15	206
20:12	91
20:13	92
20:13a	92
20:13–15	92
20:14a	82, 93
20:14b	93
20:14b–15	82
20:15	93
20:16	80, 91
20:17–34	79
20:25–28	80
20:12	50
21:28–32	98
21:33–41	98
21:44	98
22:1–14	98
22:2	83

22:11–14 10
23:12 175
23:23 187
24–25 151
25:1 83
25:1–13 151
25:14 10, 154, 155
25:14–15 157
25:14–30 77, 150–68, 257
25:14b–28 155
25:15b 151, 152
25:15c 162
25:16–18 157
25:17 161
25:19 162
25:19a 151
25:19–28 157
25:24b–25 153
25:29 151, 155, 159
25:30 151, 155, 157, 166
25:31 10
26:1 131
26:11 128

Mark
1:15 10
3:22–27 32
3:31–34 208
4:9 218
4:14–20 12
4:26 10
4:26–29 10
6:6b–13 210
10:1–31 79
10:28–31 208
10:31 82
10:32–52 79
11:1–13:37 100
11:15–17 197
11:27–12:34 100
12:1–9 43

12:1–11/12 10, 77, 98–113, 206
12:1 100, 102,
12:1b 107, 109
12:2 107, 109
12:3–8 109
12:4 101
12:5 100
12:5b 107, 109, 110
12:6b 110
12:7 113, 206
12:9a 100, 107
12:9b 100
12:9 113
12:38–40 227
13:34–37 10
14:7 128

Luke
8:18 151
9:1–6 210
9:51 173
10:1–16 210
10:10–12 211
10:25–28 12
10:25–37 10
10:34–35 235
10:36–37 12
11:1–4 194
11:3 194
11:5–6 196
11:5–7 196
11:5–8 171, 194–214, 198, 215, 216, 217, 219
11:6a 209
11:7 195, 196, 201,202
11:8 214
11:9–10 196
11:9–13 194, 196
11:11–12 196, 197
11:13 196, 197, 236
11:42 187

12:15–21 235
12:33 235
13:6–9 10
13:22–30 130
13:24–30 10
13:28–30 211
13:30 82
14:11 175
14:13–14 235
14:15–24 10
15:1 237
15:l–3a 237
15:2 237
15:3–7 10
15:4–7 12
15:11a 237
15:11–32 236, 237
15:13 164, 251
16:1 237, 254
16:1a 237
16:1–7 235, 238
16:l–8a 236
16:1–9 171, 233–58
16:2 254
16:3 254
16:3–7 254
16:4 256
16:5–7 72, 248
16:7 233, 234
16:8 234, 238
16:8a 234, 235, 237, 254
16:8b 234, 235
16:8b–9 235
16:8b–13 236
16:9 234, 235, 236, 238
16:10 235
16:10–12 235, 236
16:10–13 235
16:11 235
16:12 235
16:13 235, 236

16:14 237
16:14–18:14 174
16:19 85
16:19–31 77, 114–30, 211
16:19–26 114, 116
16:19–15 115
16:19–22 120
16:22 120, 121
16:23 121
16:23–31 121
16:24 122
16:26 59, 115, 116
16:27 124
16:27–31 114, 115, 116
16:29 124
16:30 125
16:31 125
17:20–37 216
17:20–18:8 174
17:20–18:14 215
18:1 215, 216, 218
18:1–8 198, 215–32
18:2–5 215, 220
18:2–6 216
18:2–8 216
18:4b–5 216
18:6 215, 216, 218, 220, 221
18:6b 216
18:6–7 236
18:6–8 215
18:7 217
18:7–8 198, 216, 217, 218
18:7–8a 216
18:8a 217
18:8b 216, 217
18:1–14 12, 174
18:1–8 171, 174, 194, 195, 196, 202
18:9 175
18:9–19:10 174
18:9–14 171, 173–93, 174, 215,

216
18:10–13 175
18:10–14a 175
18:14a 175, 189, 192
18:14b 175
18:15 174
18:24–25 235
19:1–10 174
19:8 235
19:11–27 77, 150–68, 151
19:11 151
19:12 154, 158
19:13 151
19:14 150, 162
19:15 163
19:15a 150
19:20–21 162
19:20b–21 153
19:26 151
19:27 150, 162, 173
19:44 173
20:9 98
20:9–19 98
20:10–12 98
20:13 98
20:15a 98
20:16b 98
20:17 98
20:18 98
24 115

John
13:23 121

Hebrews
13:2 211

James
2:23 212

Revelation
18:12 117

Hellenistic Authors

Aristotle
Politics
Book 1 156

Flavius Josephus
Antiquities
4:8.14, 38 222
10:186 158
12:175–176 143
15:305–316 148
16:62–65 148
16:155–156 138
17:118–119 213
17:299–320 148
17:317–320 55
17:318–320 143

Jewish War
2.14.1 222
2.20.5 222
2.295 242

Sophocles
Oedipus at Colonus
1364 242

Parables as Subversive Speech

William R. Herzog II

Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed